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Silver

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(54) **METHODS, SYSTEMS, AND PRODUCTS FOR SUPPRESSION OF ALERTS**

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See application file for complete search history.

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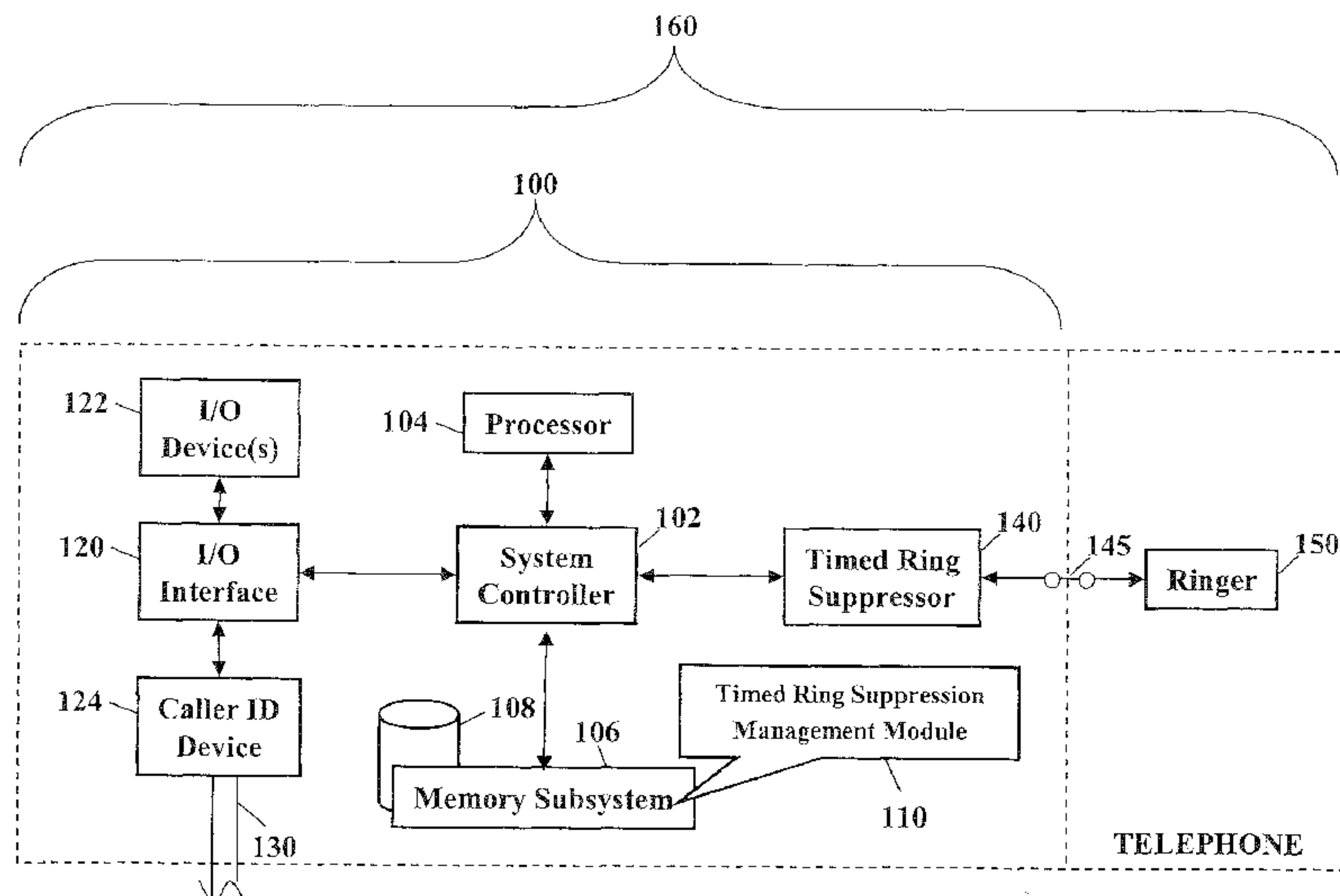
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

Audible alerts are suppressed for subsequent calls from a calling address. An initial audible alert is processed for an initial call from the calling address. Subsequent audible alerts from the same calling address are suppressed, such that subsequent calls from the calling address may fail to alert. Visual alerts may still be processed.

20 Claims, 16 Drawing Sheets



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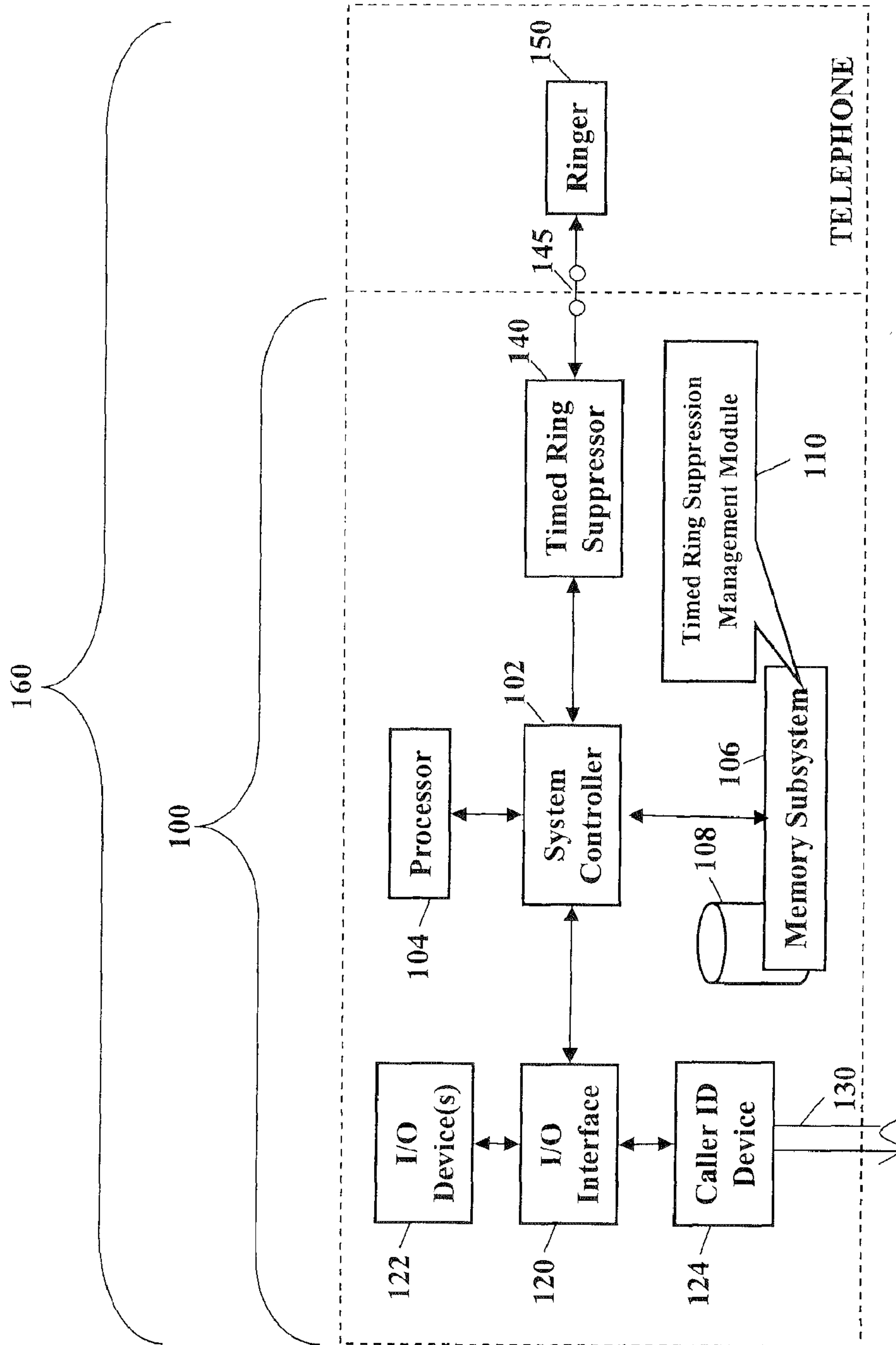
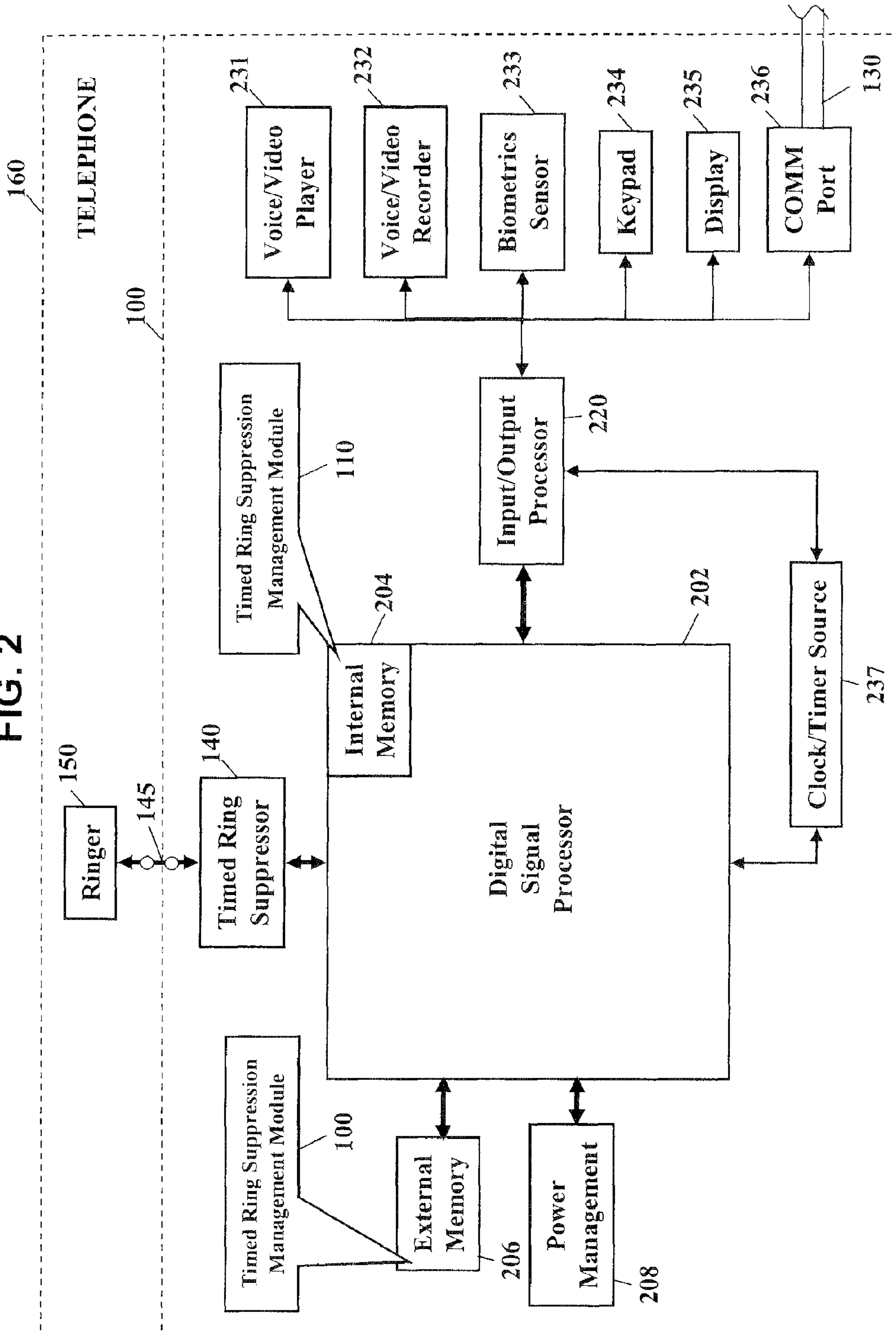


FIG. 1

FIG. 2



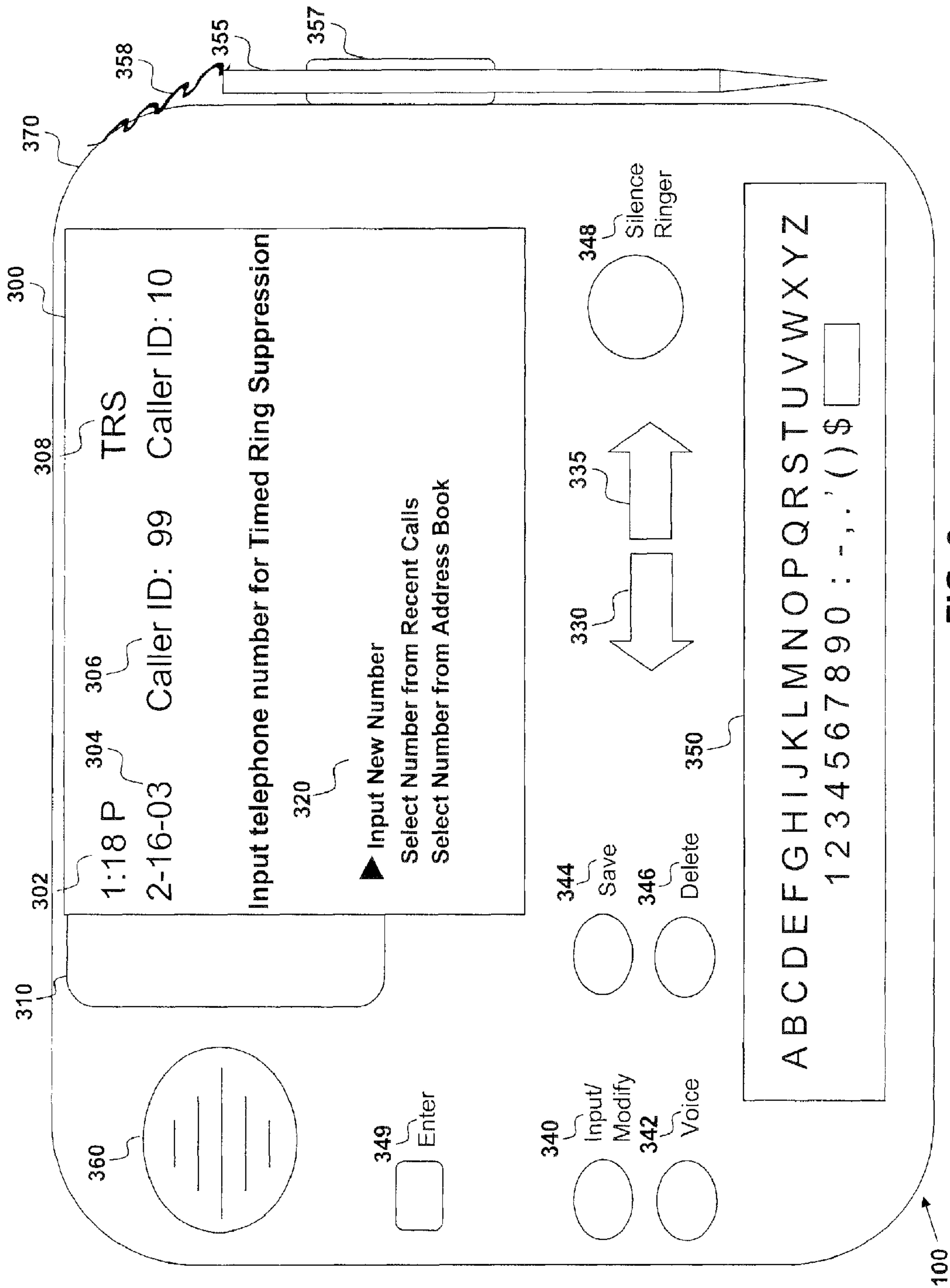
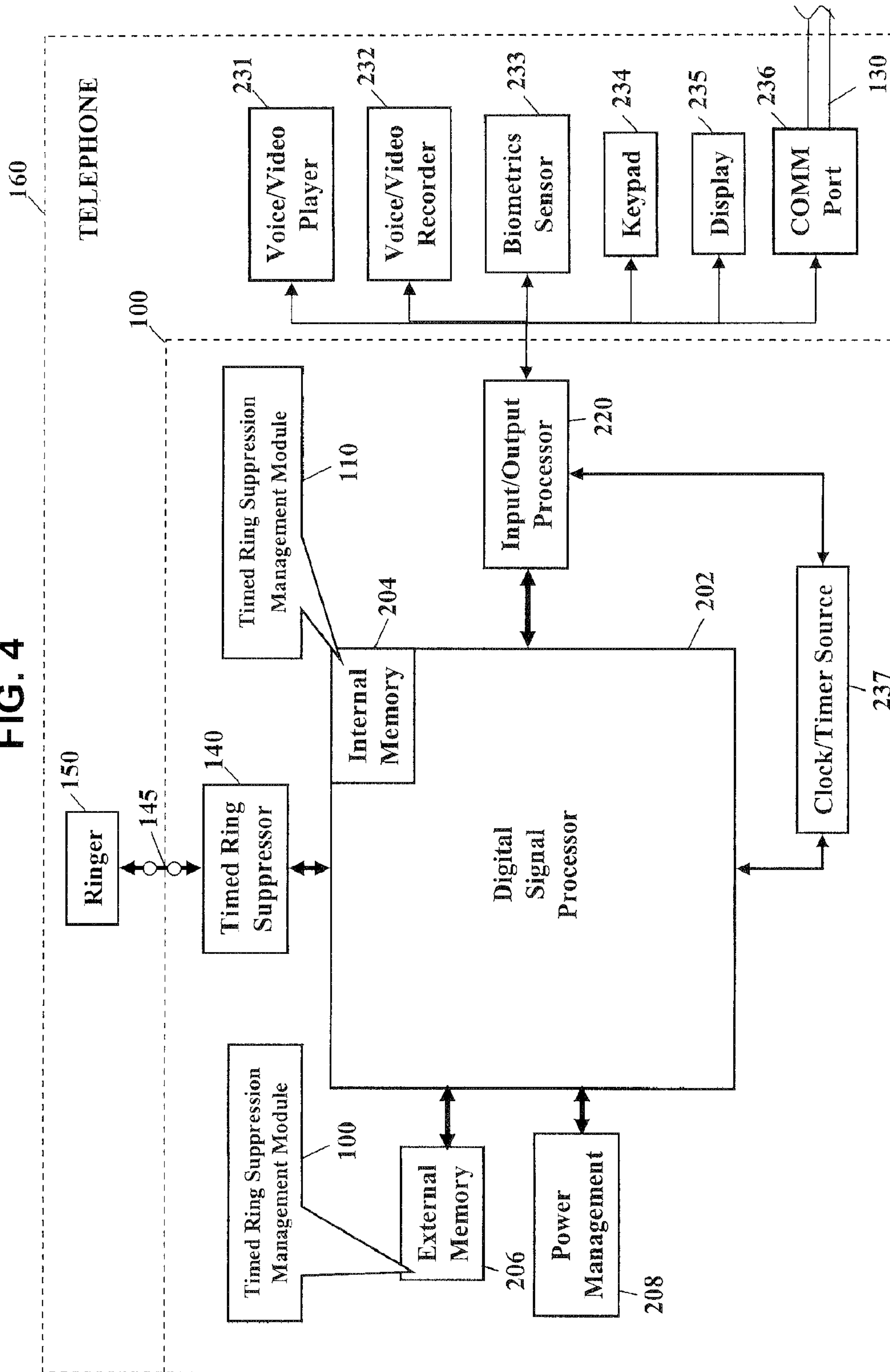


FIG. 3

FIG. 4



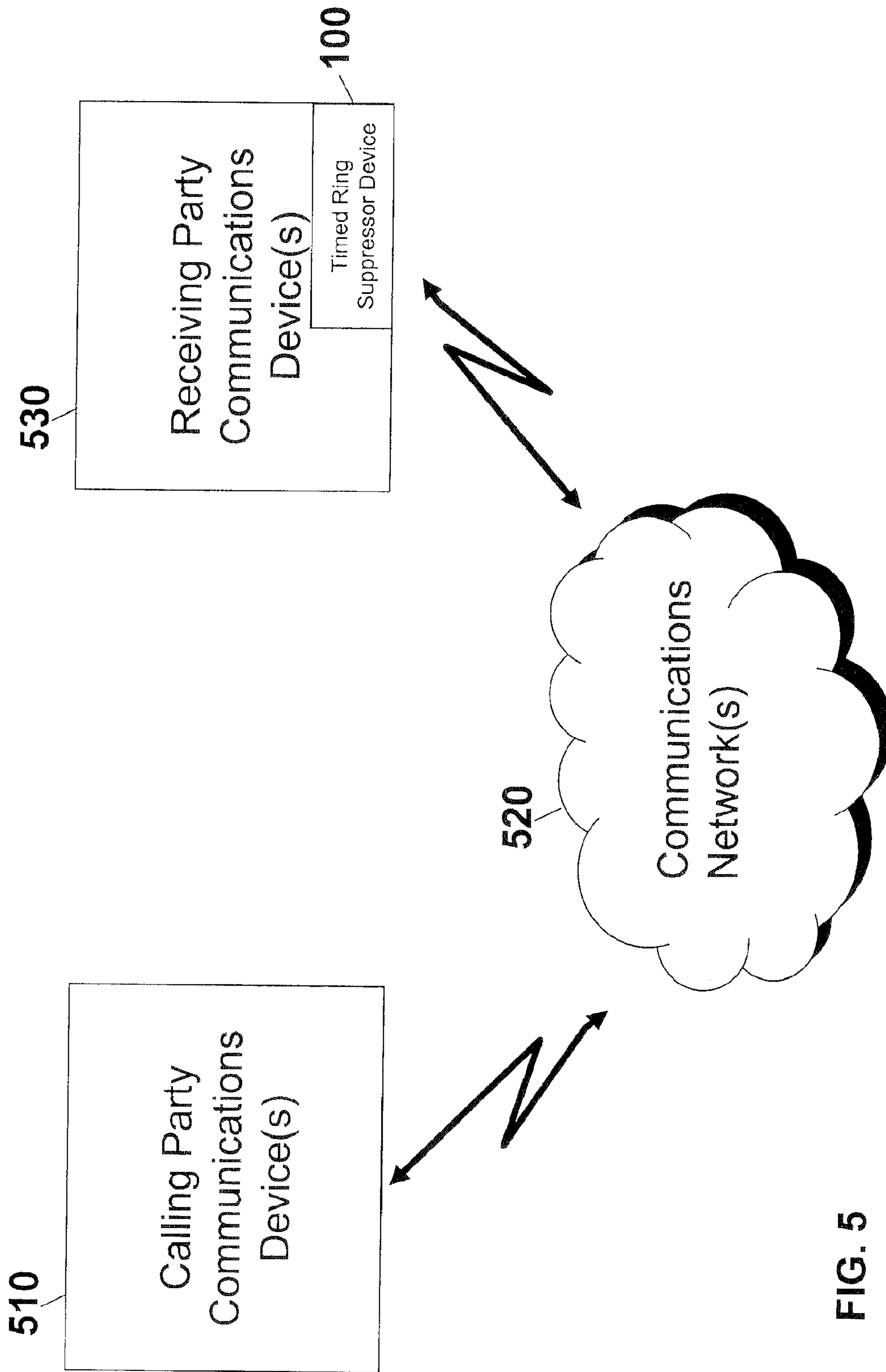


FIG. 5

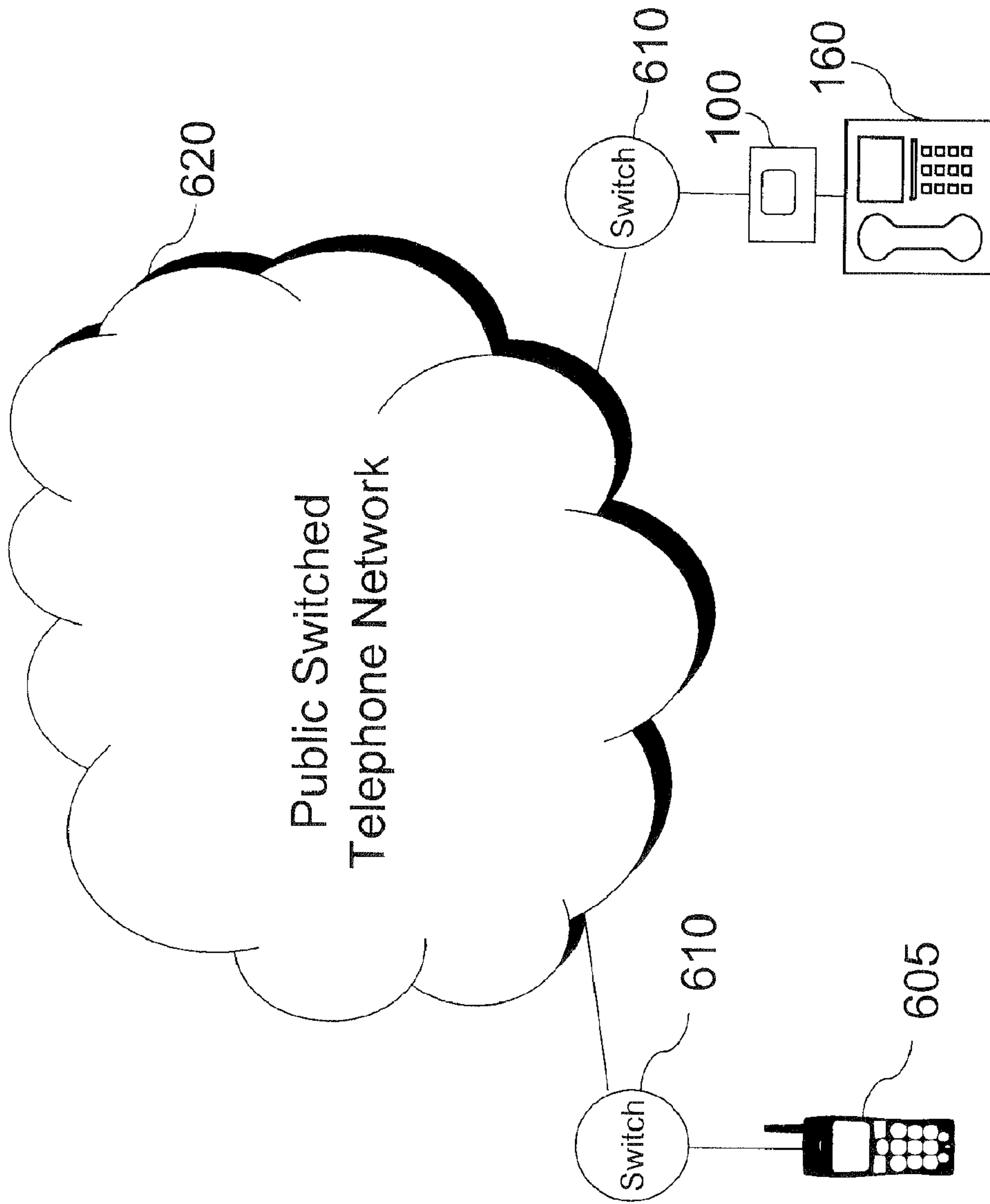


FIG. 6

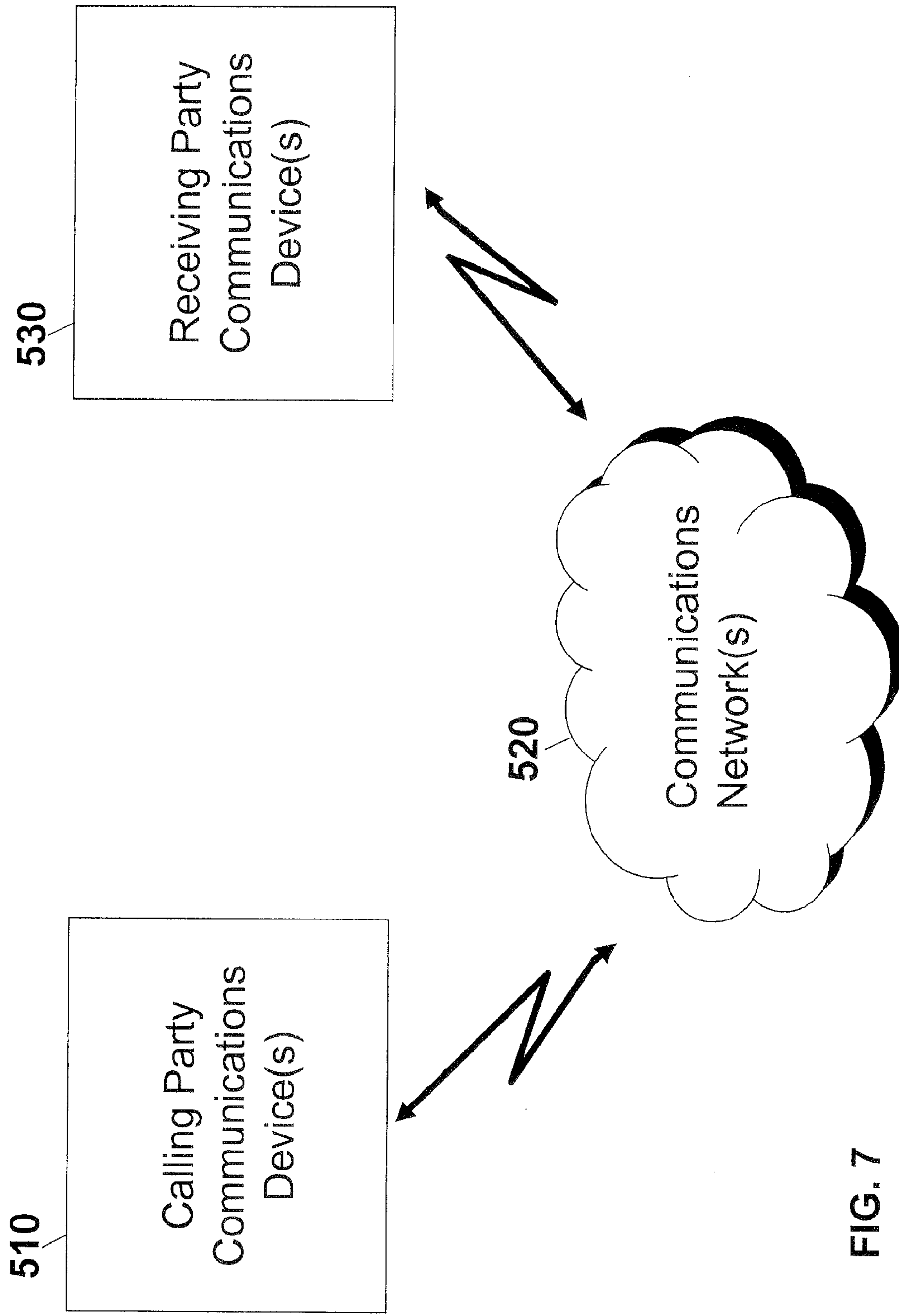


FIG. 7

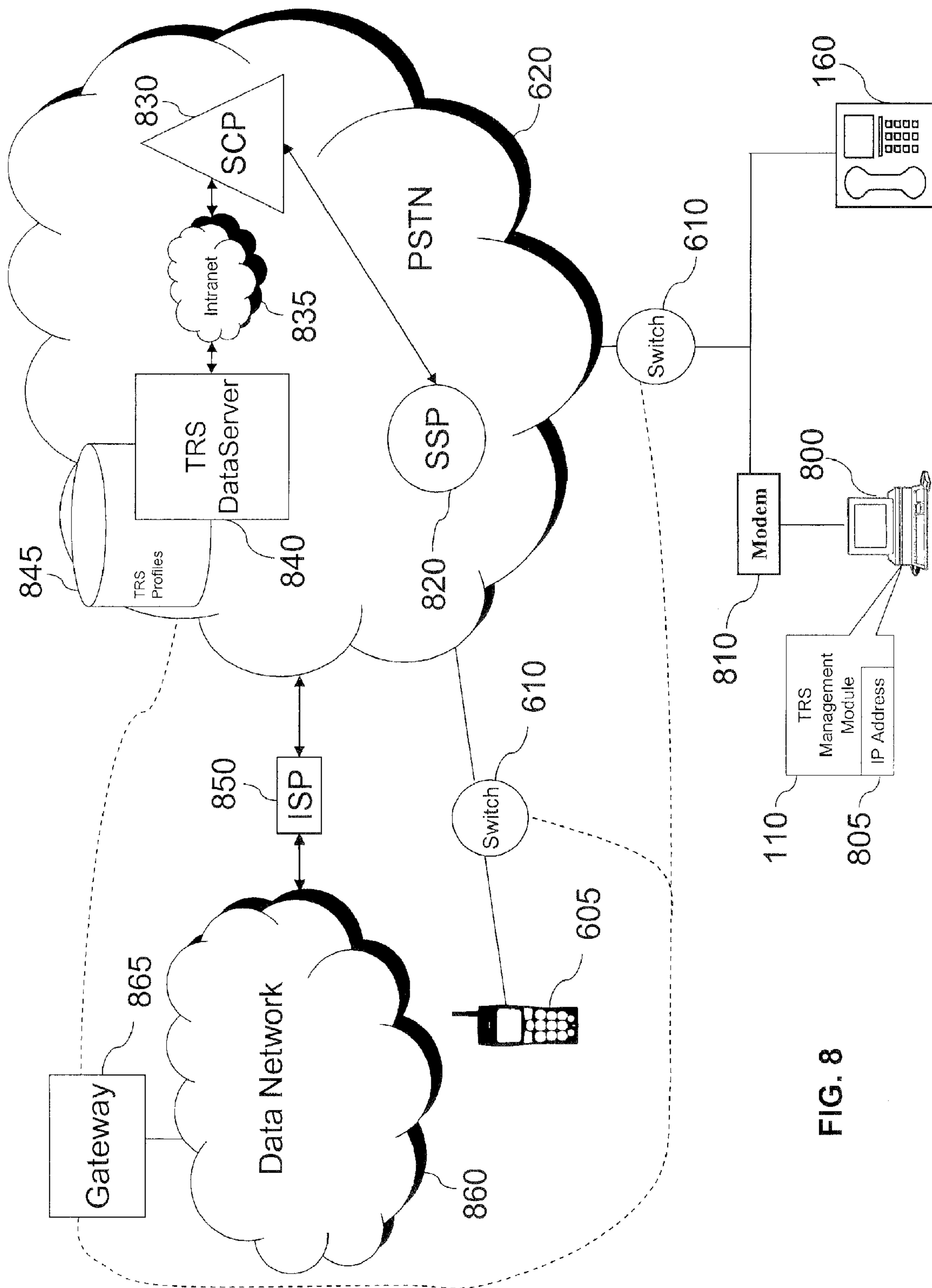


FIG. 8

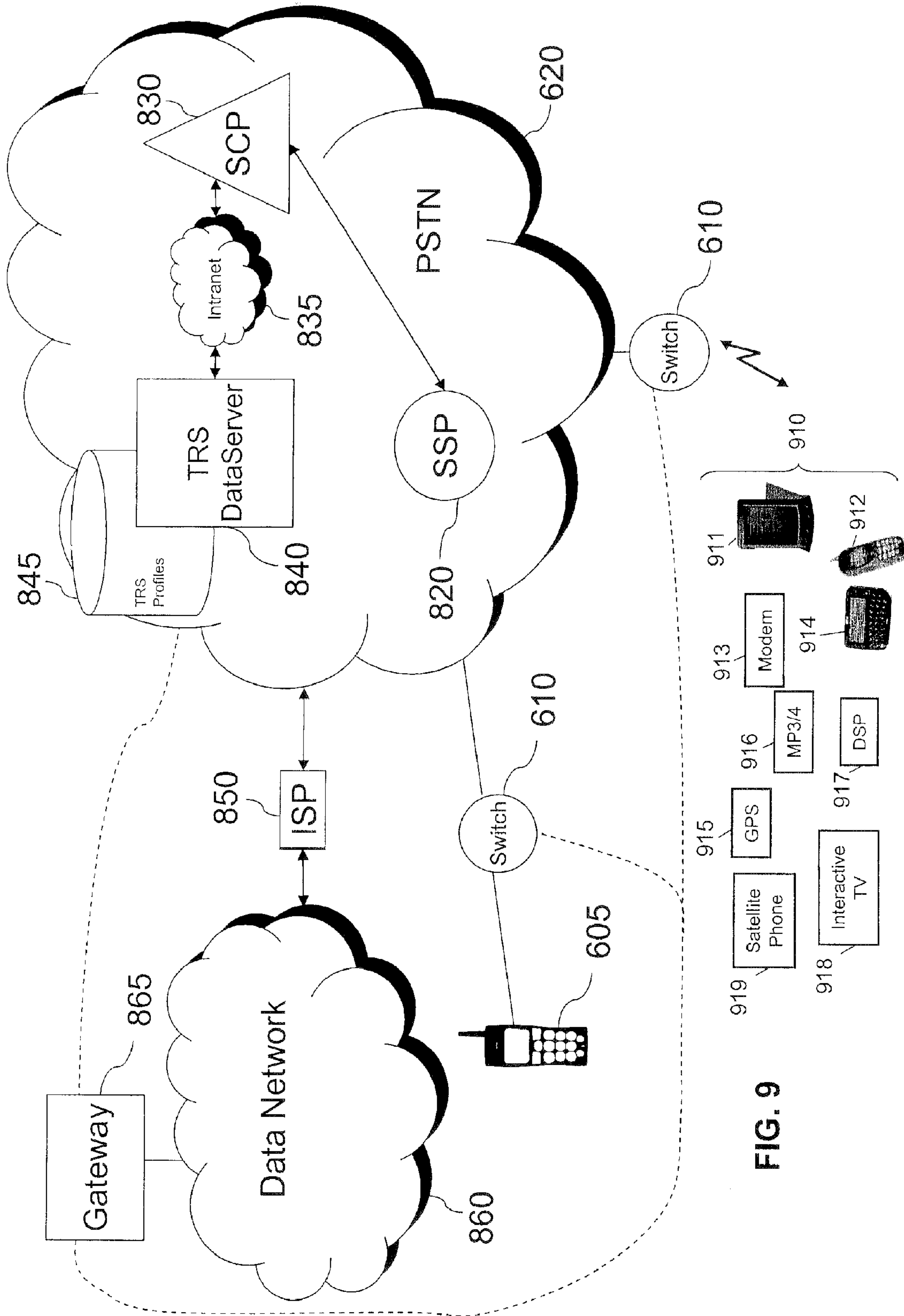


FIG. 9

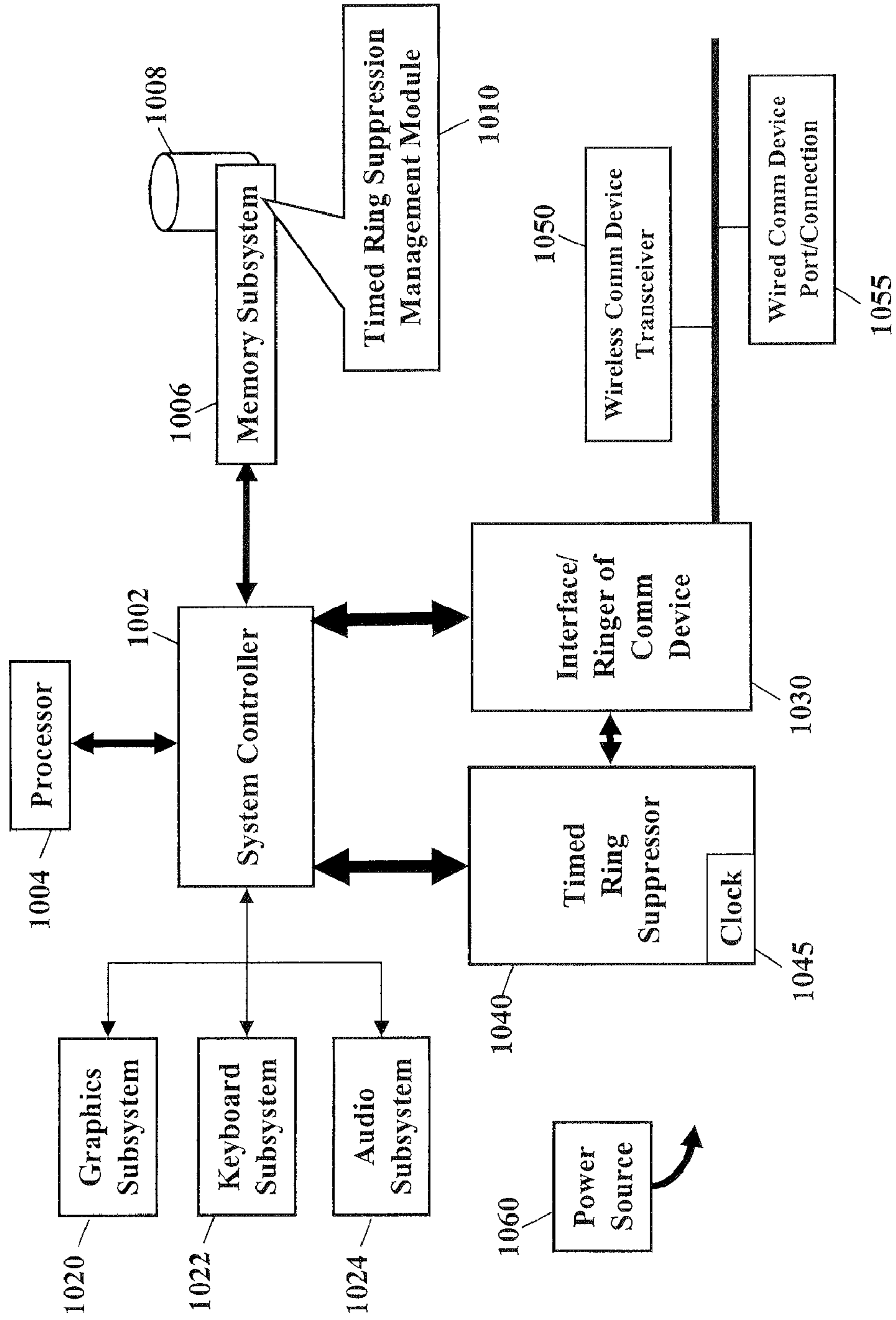
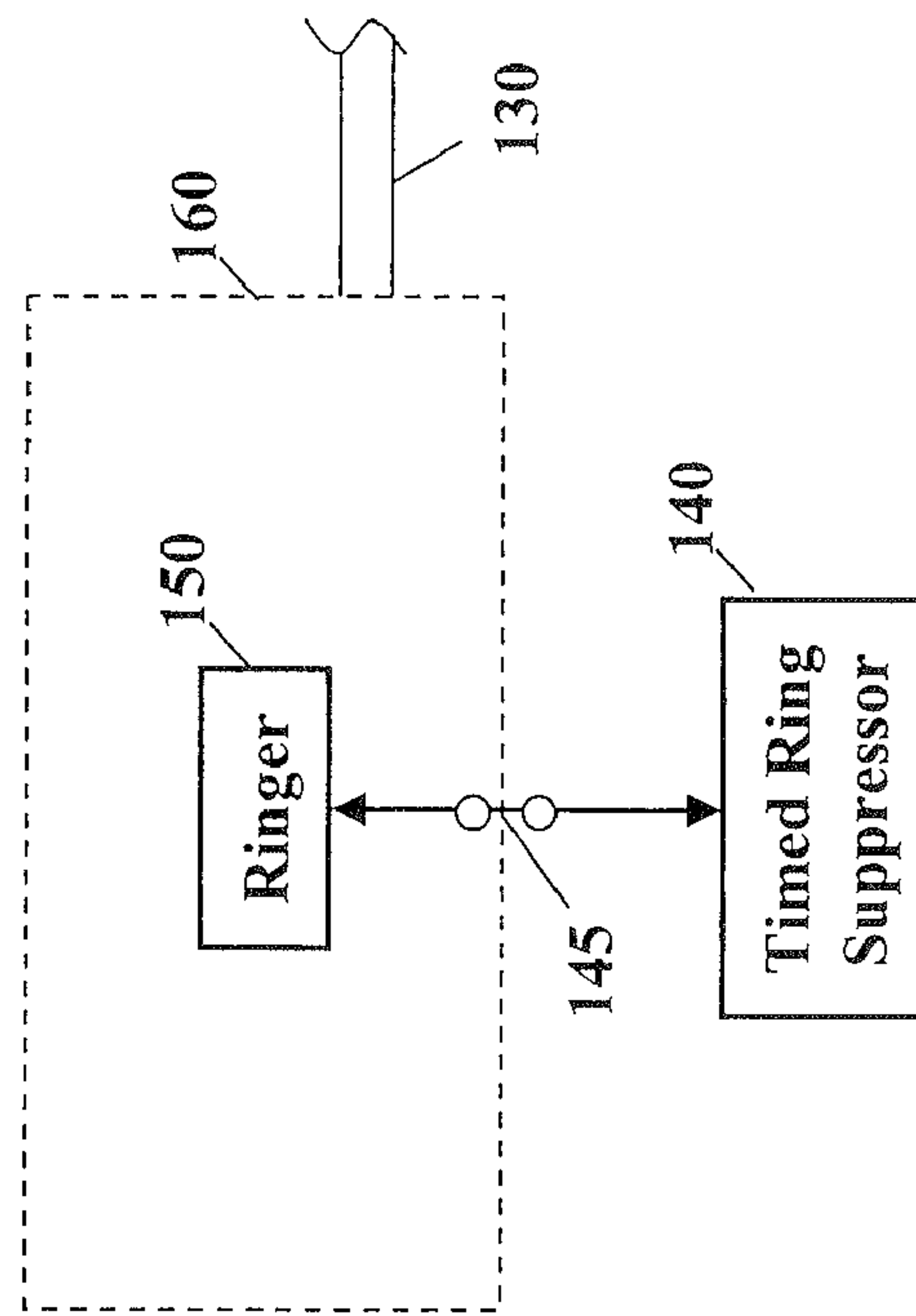


FIG. 10

FIG. 11



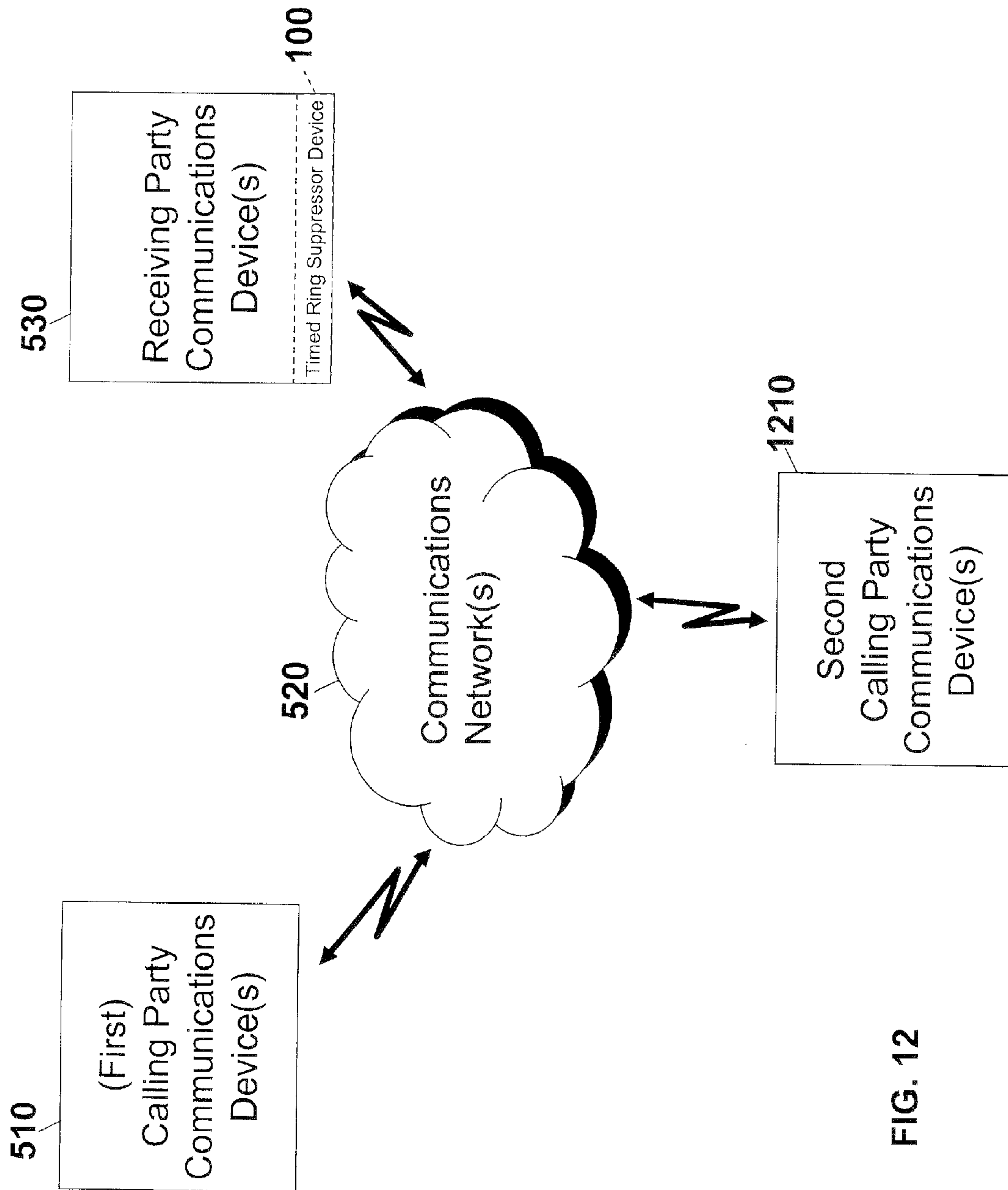


FIG. 12

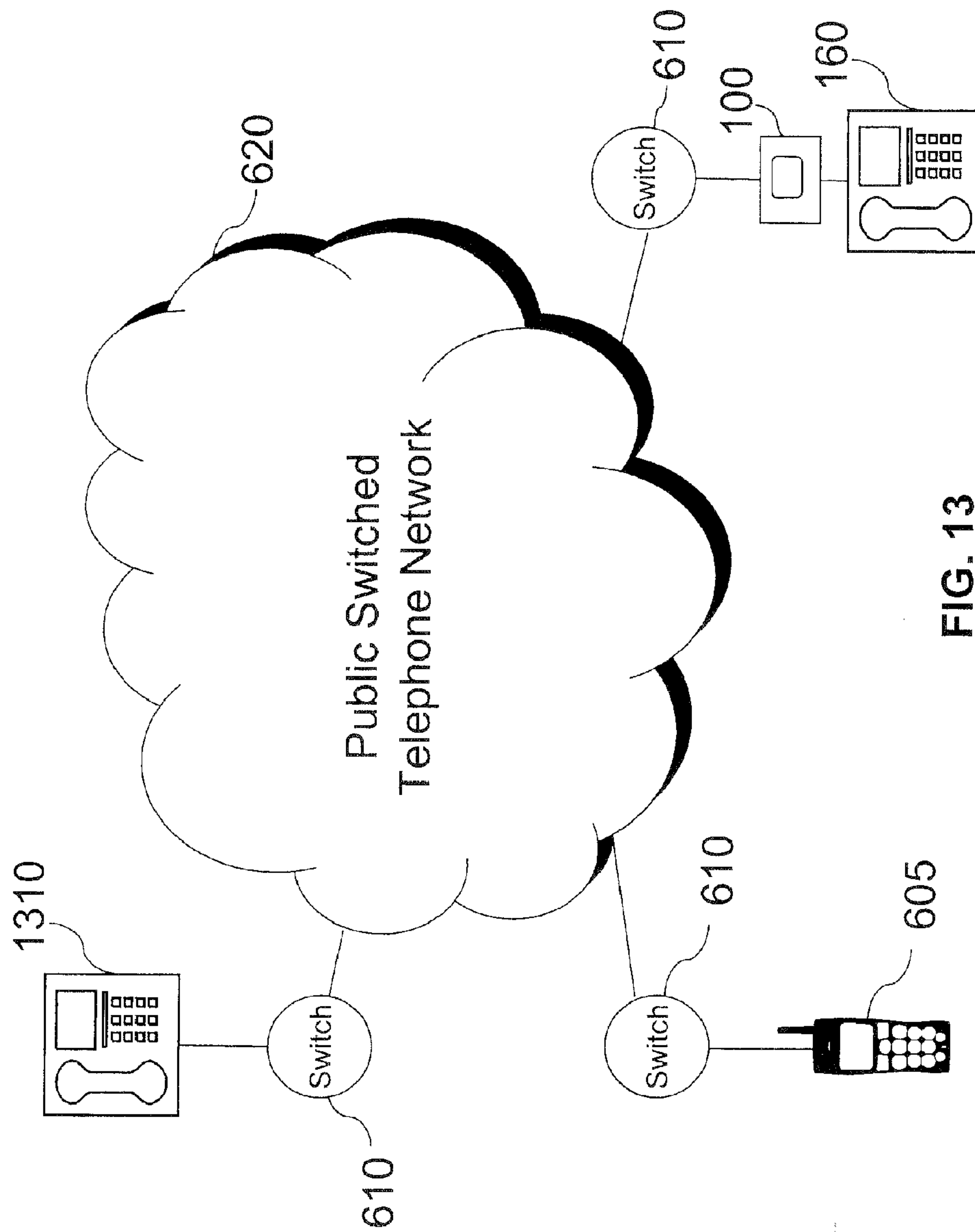


FIG. 13

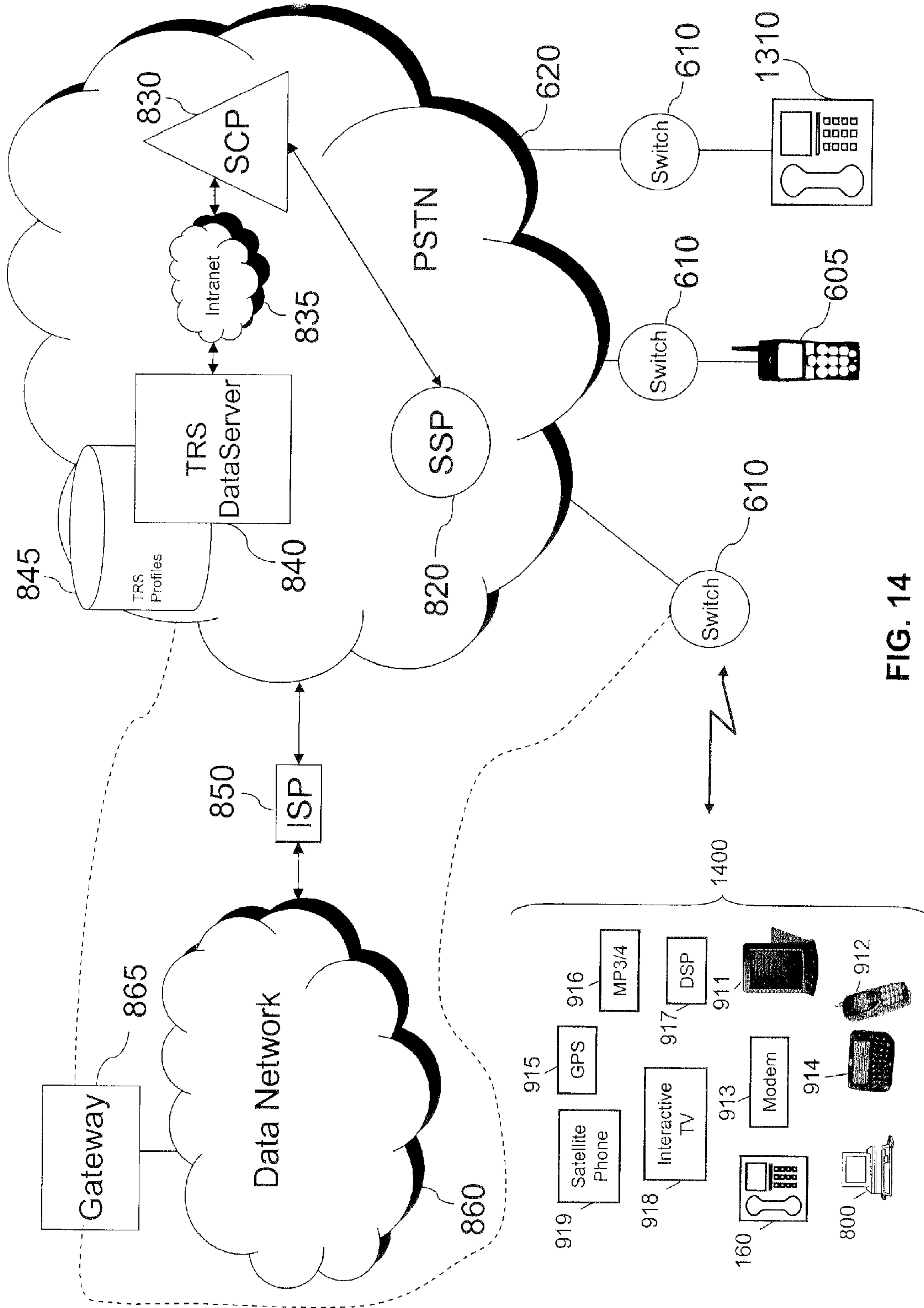


FIG. 14

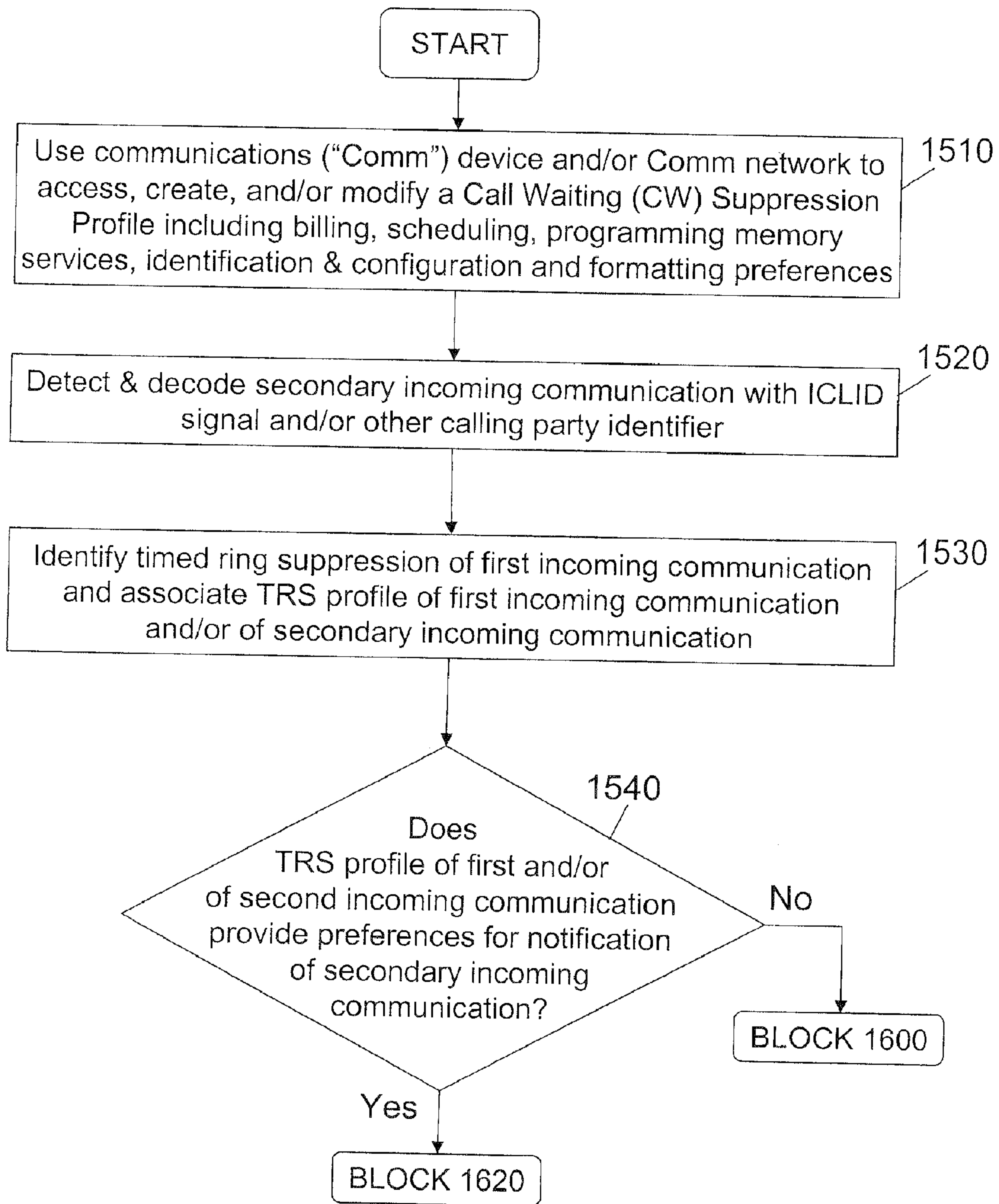


FIG. 15

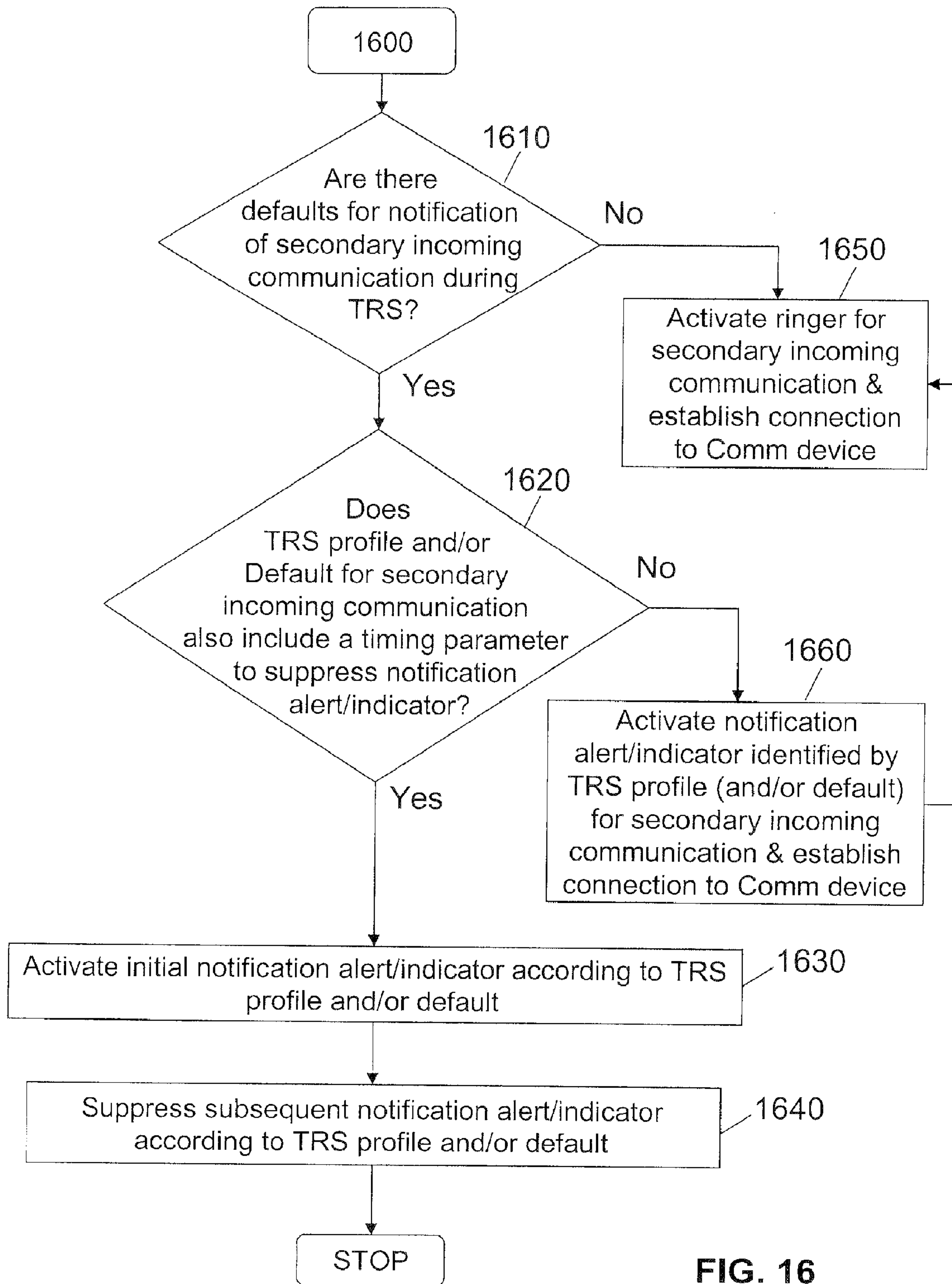


FIG. 16

METHODS, SYSTEMS, AND PRODUCTS FOR SUPPRESSION OF ALERTS

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 12/259,545 filed Oct. 28, 2008 and since issued as U.S. Pat. No. 8,619,954, which is a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 10/673,949 filed Sep. 29, 2003 and since issued as U.S. Pat. No. 7,443,967, with both applications incorporated herein by reference in their entireties.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

This invention relates generally to the field of communications. More particularly, this invention relates to systems and methods for timed ring suppression of communications devices.

2. Description of the Related Art

Telecommunications has experienced explosive growth, and more growth is planned as telecommunication access and numerous communications devices improve. This explosive growth is revolutionizing special services offered to subscribing customers. Of the special service offerings, the most relevant to this invention is the caller identification or Caller ID services. A customer or a user of a telephone that is served by the Caller ID service is provided with a calling party's directory information. Presently available Caller ID systems provide the calling party's telephone number and a billing name associated with the calling party's telephone number (if available) when an incoming caller line identification (ICLID) signal can be detected, decoded, and transmitted to the called telephone or other display device associated with the called telephone (e.g., a Caller ID device). The Caller ID services also allow the customer to receive directory information for other incoming calls while the customer's phone is used (e.g., during a conversation with another party); this service is sometimes referred to as Caller ID Call Waiting service.

A customer may use the displayed Caller ID information to make a decision to answer and/or to prepare for the call. In addition, the customer may use Caller ID information to block incoming calls associated with one or more ICLID signals including specific telephone numbers selected by the customer and/or privacy screening services for unidentifiable telephone numbers of incoming calls (e.g., telemarketers). If the customer wants to selectively answer incoming calls using Caller ID information, the customer has several choices—block the call or ignore the ringing (or other audible alerts) until the call is processed by a voice messaging system (or other call handling system) or until the caller hangs up. If the call is blocked, then the customer may not have immediate notification of the incoming blocked call to re-evaluate whether to accept the call since circumstances for accepting the call may change. If the customer ignores the call and listens to unwanted ringing, then the customer may be annoyed with the repetitive noise alerting the customer of the call. In recent years, telephony providers and manufacturers have tried to provide alternate systems and methods to alert the customer of selective incoming calls that minimizes interruptions for unwanted calls.

For example, U.S. Pat. No. 5,351,289 to Logsdon et al., entitled "Caller ID Telephone Security Device," discloses a caller ID telephone security system. This caller ID telephone security system mutes the ringer of a telephone until the

ICLID signal of the incoming call is compared with a list of telephone numbers (or other reference data) to determine whether to activate the ringer and pass the call to the communications device. If the call does not pass through to the communications device, then the call is blocked, the ringer is never activated, and, thus, the customer is not alerted of the incoming call. Further, because this invention requires that the customer to predetermine which calls to pass through and which calls to block, if the customer has not identified a particular telephone number (or other reference data) to pass through or block, then a desired call may be blocked or an unwanted call may ring and pass through.

Another example, U.S. Pat. No. 6,400,814 to Adams, entitled "Telephone with Ringer Silencer Screening Feature," discloses a telephone with a ringer silencer that allows the customer to depress a keypad to deactivate the ringer on a call-by-call basis after activation of the ringer by receipt of the incoming call. That is, the ringer produces an audible alert until the customer is able to depress the keypad. Once the keypad is depressed, the ringer does not produce another audible alert until the next incoming call. Another embodiment discloses a system that either deactivates the ringer or that allows the customer to depress a keypad to transfer the call to a voice messaging system thus terminating the signal to the ringer. Again, the customer may be annoyed with the ringing until the keypad is depressed, and if the customer accidentally depresses the transfer keypad, then the call is routed to voicemail and the customer can not answer the call.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

This invention addresses the above and other needs by providing systems and methods for enabling notification of a second incoming communication during timed ring suppression of a first communication. Typically, a customer receives a first incoming call to a communications device and is alerted of the first incoming call with an initial audible alert (e.g., a ring) produced by a ringer (or alternate noise maker) of the communications device. Subsequent rings of the ringer may be suppressed for a selected time period such that one or more rings are silenced during an uninterrupted on-hook state of the telephone. Thereafter, the customer receives a second incoming call to the communications device and is alerted of the second incoming call with either a similar audible alert or a distinctive audible alert produced by a ringer (or alternate noise maker) of the communications device while the notification alert/indicator of the first incoming call is suppressed.

In an embodiment, a communications system for timed ring suppression includes a communications dataserver and a timed ring suppression application. The dataserver communicates with a communications network to detect, decode, communicate, and/or send notification of a second incoming communications signal to a receiving party's communications device while a communications indicator/alert (such as, for example a ringer) is time ring suppressed for a first incoming communications signal. The dataserver stores a timed ring suppression profile (also referred to as timed ring suppression reference data) that includes a parameter associated with an incoming line identification signal of the first incoming communications signal, a timing parameter for suppressing an audible alert (or alternate communications indicator) of the receiving party's communications device after the receiving party's communications device activates the audible alert to produce an initial audible alert of the first incoming communications signal, and a second call during timed ring suppression parameter for activating the audible alert of the receiving party's communications device of the

second incoming communications signal while the audible alert of the receiving party's communications device is suppressed for the first incoming communications signal. The timed ring suppression application generates the timed ring suppression signal to activate an audible alert of the second incoming communications signal according to the timed ring suppression profile while the audible alert of the receiving party's communications device is suppressed for the first incoming communications signal. The communications network may include a public switched telephone network, a mobile switching telephone communications network, a satellite communications network, and/or a world wide electronic data communications network having a timed ring suppression interface via at least one of an internet, an intranet, or an extranet. In various embodiments, the timed ring suppression may be controlled by customer premise hardware and equipment including a telephone (or alternate communications device) with a built in (or otherwise integrated) timed ring suppressor and a stand-alone timed ring suppressor coupled with the telephone. In an alternate embodiment, the timed ring suppression may be controlled by a communications network that detects, decodes, and processes timed ring suppression of the incoming communications signals to the receiving party's communications device. Additionally, emergency personnel, authorized calling parties, and other authorized entities (e.g., a technician of the communications network) may override the timed ring suppression to continuously audibly alert the customer (or another receiving party) of the incoming communications signal.

Another embodiment discloses a timed ring suppressor system that includes a first switch communicating with a first calling party's communications device, a second switch communicating with a second calling party's communications device, a third switch communicating with a receiving party's communications device, and a communications network coupling one or more of the switches. The communications network processes an incoming line identification (ICLID) signal of a first incoming communications signal associated with the first calling party's communications device to generate a timed ring suppression signal and transmits the first incoming communications signal and the timed ring suppression signal to the third switch. The third switch processes the timed ring suppression signal to suppress a ringer of the receiving party's communications device after the receiving party's communications device activates the ringer to produce an initial audible alert of the first incoming communications signal such that subsequent audible alerts of the first incoming communications signal are suppressed according to a timing parameter. Thereafter, the communications network processes an ICLID signal of a second communications signal associated with the second calling party's communications device and supplants the timed ring suppression signal associated with the ICLID signal of the first incoming communication such that the second incoming communication signal and the supplanted timed ring suppression signal are communicated with the third switch. Then, the third switch processes the supplanted timed ring suppression signal to activate the ringer of the receiving party's communications device to produce an audible alert of the second incoming communications signal while the audible alert is suppressed for the first incoming communications signal.

Another embodiment discloses a timed ring suppression system that includes a telecommunications server for processing a first incoming communication to a called telephone number, a timed ring suppression signal associated with the called telephone number and an ICLID signal of the first incoming communication, a second incoming communica-

tion to the called telephone number, and a supplanted timed ring suppression signal associated with the ICLID signal of the second incoming communication and/or the timed ring suppression signal. The timed ring suppression signal for suppressing a ringer of the receiving party's communications device after the receiving party's communications device activates the ringer to produce an initial audible alert of the telephone call such that subsequent audible alerts are suppressed according to a timing parameter, and the supplanted timed ring suppression signal for activating the ringer of the receiving party's communications device to produce an audible alert of the second incoming communication while the audible alert of the first incoming communication is suppressed.

Other embodiments disclose methods for timed ring suppression. According to an embodiment, a method for timed ring suppression includes (1) processing a first incoming communications signal from a first calling party's communications device to a receiving party's communications device, (2) associating an incoming line identification (ICLID) signal with the first incoming communications signal, (3) associating a timed ring suppression profile with the ICLID signal of the first incoming communications signal, (4) generating a timed ring suppression signal, (5) processing a second incoming communications signal from a second calling party's communications device to the receiving party's communications device, (6) associating an incoming line identification (ICLID) signal with the second incoming communications signal, (7) associating the timed ring suppression profile with the ICLID signal of the second communications signal, and (8) generating a supplanted timed ring suppression signal. The supplanted timed ring suppression profile includes an identifier of the calling party, a communications address associated with the calling party's communications device, an identifier of the calling party's communications device, and/or an alert preference for notifying the receiving party's communications device of the second incoming communications signal while the ringer is suppressed according to the timing parameter for notification of the first incoming communications signal. Further, the supplanted timed ring suppression signal activates an audible alert of the second incoming communications signal while the audible alert is suppressed according to the timing parameter for notification of the first incoming communications signal.

Further details on these embodiments and other possible embodiments including methods of timed ring suppression are set forth below. As is appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art, this invention has wide utility in a number of areas as illustrated by the discussion below. These embodiments may be accomplished singularly, or in combination, in one or more of the implementations of this invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The above and other embodiments, objects, uses, advantages, and novel features of this invention are more clearly understood by reference to the following description taken in connection with the accompanying figures, wherein:

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a timed ring suppressor device according to embodiments of this invention;

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of a timed ring suppressor device according to embodiments of this invention;

FIG. 3 is perspective front view of the timed ring suppressor device of FIG. 2 including a screen display for inputting a communications address for timed ring suppression according to embodiments of this invention;

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FIG. 4 is a block diagram of a timed ring suppressor device according to embodiments of this invention;

FIG. 5 is a schematic of a timed ring suppression system illustrating a communications network connecting a calling party's communications device with a receiving party's communications device and a timed ring suppressor device according to embodiments of this invention;

FIG. 6 is a schematic of a timed ring suppression system illustrating a public switched telephone network connecting a calling party's telephone with a customer's telephone and a timed ring suppressor device according to embodiments of this invention;

FIG. 7 is a schematic of a timed ring suppression system illustrating a communications network connecting a calling party's communications device with a receiving party's communications device according to embodiments of this invention;

FIG. 8 is a schematic of a timed ring suppression system illustrating the communications connections of a calling party's telephone, one or more communications networks, a customer's telephone, and a customer's computer according to embodiments of this invention;

FIG. 9 is a schematic of a timed ring suppression system illustrating the communications connections of a calling party's telephone, one or more communications networks, and a plurality of various communications devices according to embodiments of this invention;

FIG. 10 is a block diagram of a timed ring suppressor device according to embodiments of this invention;

FIG. 11 is a block diagram of a timed ring suppressor device according to an alternate embodiment of this invention;

FIG. 12 is a schematic of a timed ring suppression system illustrating a communications network connecting a second calling party's communications device, the receiving party's communications device, and the (first) calling party's communications device according to embodiments of this invention;

FIG. 13 is a schematic of a timed ring suppression system illustrating a public switched telephone network connecting a second calling party's communications device, the receiving party's communications device, and the (first) calling party's communications device according to embodiments of this invention;

FIG. 14 is a schematic of a timed ring suppression system illustrating the communications connections of a second calling party's telephone, one or more communications networks, a plurality of various receiving party communications devices, and a (first) calling party's telephone according to embodiments of this invention; and

FIGS. 15-16 are flowcharts describing timed ring suppression according to embodiments of this invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

This invention now will be described more fully hereinafter with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which exemplary embodiments are shown. This invention may, however, be embodied in many different forms and should not be construed as limited to the embodiments set forth herein; rather, these embodiments are provided so that this disclosure will be thorough and complete, and will fully convey the scope of the invention to those of ordinary skill in the art. Moreover, all statements herein reciting embodiments of the invention, as well as specific examples thereof, are intended to encompass both structural and functional equivalents thereof. Additionally, it is intended that such equivalents

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include both currently known equivalents as well as equivalents developed in the future (i.e., any elements developed that perform the same function, regardless of structure).

Thus, for example, it will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that the diagrams, schematics, flowcharts, and the like represent conceptual views or processes illustrating systems and methods embodying this invention. The functions of the various elements shown in the figures may be provided through the use of dedicated hardware as well as hardware capable of executing associated software. Similarly, any switches shown in the figures are conceptual only. Their function may be carried out through the operation of program logic, through dedicated logic, through the interaction of program control and dedicated logic, or even manually, the particular technique being selectable by the entity implementing this invention. Those of ordinary skill in the art further understand that the exemplary hardware, software, processes, methods, and/or operating systems described herein are for illustrative purposes and, thus, are not intended to be limited to any particular named manufacturer.

The timed ring suppression systems and methods of this invention operate with different communications devices and communications networks to enable, disable and/or otherwise control secondary incoming communications during timed ring suppression of a first incoming communication. The timed ring suppressor leverages the assets of the connected communications device(s) and/or communications networks in terms optimally using the connected software, hardware, equipment, networks, and/or other information technology assets. For example, a customer's communications device may have a local and/or a wide area network that utilizes Ethernet, dedicated private lines, Frame Relay, ISDN, ATM, ADSL, and the like to provide a high speed connection to a data network, such as the Internet, Intranet, and/or Extranet. Typically, the customer receives a first incoming call to a communications device and is alerted of the first incoming call with an initial audible alert (e.g., a ring) produced by a ringer (or alternate noise maker) of the communications device. Subsequent rings of the ringer may be suppressed for a selected time period such that one or more rings are silenced during an uninterrupted on-hook state of the telephone. Thereafter, the customer receives a second incoming call to the communications device and is alerted of the second incoming call with either a similar audible alert or a distinctive audible alert produced by a ringer (or alternate noise maker) of the communications device while the notification alert/indicator of the first incoming call is suppressed. The timed ring suppression may be controlled by customer premise hardware and equipment including a telephone (or alternate communications device) with a built in (or otherwise integrated) timed ring suppressor and/or a stand-alone timed ring suppressor coupled with the telephone. In an alternate embodiment, the timed ring suppression may be controlled by a communications network that detects, decodes, and processes timed ring suppression of the incoming call to the communications device. Additionally, emergency personnel, authorized calling parties, and other authorized entities (e.g., a technician of the communications network) may override the timed ring suppression to continuously audibly alert the customer (or another receiving party) of the incoming call.

As used herein, the term "communications device" includes wired and wireless communications devices, such as a plain old telephone (POTS phone), a mobile phone, a wireless phone, a WAP phone, a satellite phone, a computer, a modem, a pager, a digital music device (e.g., MP3/4 player), a digital recording device, a personal digital assistant, an

interactive television, a digital signal processor, and a Global Positioning System device. Further, as used herein, the term “data” includes electronic information, such as, for example facsimile, electronic mail (e-mail), text, video, audio, and/or voice in a variety of formats, such as dual tone multi-frequency, digital, analog, and/or others. Additionally, the data may include: (1) executable programs, such as a software application, (2) an address, location, and/or other identifier of the storage location for the data, (3) integrated or otherwise combined files, such as a grouping of destination communications addresses associated with the receiving party, and/or (4) timed ring suppression profiles, including configuration, authenticity, security, and other data. In various embodiments, the data may be stored by the communications network, a peripheral storage device connected to the communications network, the timed ring suppressor device, the communications device, and/or other connected networks.

Referring now to the figures, FIG. 1 is a block diagram showing a timed ring suppressor device 100 coupled with a telephone 160. The timed ring suppressor device includes a system controller 102, a processor 104, a memory subsystem 106, a database 108, a timed ring suppression management module (also referred to as the “timed ring suppression program”) 110, an input/output (“I/O”) interface 120, one or more input/output device(s) 122, a caller identification device 124, a telephone line connection (or connection to an alternate communications device) 130, a timed ring suppressor 140, and a circuit 145 that connects the timed ring suppressor with a ringer 150 of the telephone 160. The system controller 102, as known in the art, provides a bridging function between the processor 104, the memory subsystem 106, the input/output interface 120, and the timed ring suppressor 140. Typically, as known in the art, a system bus communicates signals, such as data signals, control signals, and address signals, between the processor 104 and the system controller 102. The processor 104 executes an operating system that controls the internal functions of the timed ring suppressor device 100. The timed ring suppression program 110 operates within the system memory 106; however, the timed ring suppression program 110 could also reside in flash memory or a peripheral storage device. The I/O Interface 120 allows the timed ring suppressor device 100 to monitor, detect, receive, and decode an incoming call identification (ICLID) signal of an incoming call via the Caller ID device 124 coupled with line 130. Alternatively, the timed ring suppressor device 100 may receive the ICLID signal from a peripheral device (not shown) or via telephone 160. The timed ring suppression program 110 compares reference data transmitted with the ICLID signal to data stored in one of more timed ring suppression profiles stored in memory 106 to activate the timed ring suppressor 140 and enable the circuit 145 to suppress the ringer 150 of telephone 160. A timing parameter of the timed ring suppression profile specifies the time period to silence the ringer and, if applicable, to enable subsequent ringing after the time period has passed. The timing parameter is preferably about six seconds to correspond with a ring cycle. The timing parameter could also be multiples of six second increments to correspond with subsequent ring cycles. The timing parameter, however, could alternatively be any duration from less than one second to not exceeding about two minutes.

FIG. 2 is a similar block diagram of the timed ring suppressor 100 of FIG. 1; however, the timed ring suppressor of FIG. 2 includes a digital signal processor 202, an internal memory system 204, an external (or peripheral) memory system 206, a power management system 208, an input/output processor 220 interfacing with a voice/video player 231,

a voice/video recorder 232, a biometrics sensor 233, a keypad 234, a display 235, a communications (“comm.”) port 236, the timed ring suppression program 110, the telephone line connection 130, the timed ring suppressor 140, and the circuit 145 that connects the timed ring suppressor 140 with the ringer 150 of the telephone 160. The timed ring suppression program 110 operates within a memory device of the digital signal processor 202. The memory device could include the internal memory 204 of the digital signal processor 202, or the memory device could include the external memory device 206 communicating with the digital signal processor 202. The digital signal processor 202 converts analog signals to digital signals and converts digital signals to analog signals. The digital signal processor 202 could include compression and decompression algorithms, cancellation algorithms, audio-processing circuitry, filter circuitry, and amplifier circuitry. Although digital signal processors can be designed to provide differing capabilities and a variety of performance criteria, the basic functions of the digital signal processor are known and, thus, will not be further discussed.

The digital signal processor 202 interfaces with an input/output processor 220. The input/output processor 220 controls system input/output and provides telephony-like control features. A bus provides a signal communication path between the digital signal processor 202 and the input/output processor 220. The input/output processor 220 is a microprocessor that includes memory (not shown), communication controllers (not shown), and peripheral controllers (not shown). The communication controllers, for example, could control packet-based communications with a data network (shown as reference numeral 860 in FIG. 8-10) through the COMM port 236. The communication controllers could also control packet-based communications with a telecommunications switch (shown as reference numeral 610 in FIGS. 6, 8-10) through the COMM port 236. The clock source 237 provides a system clock for the timed ring suppressor device 100, and the clock source 237 may also include higher and lower frequency multiples of the system clock depending upon power requirements and power availability. The power management system 208 provides differing power control mechanisms, such as a sleep mode and a low-power mode, to efficiently utilize available power and to reduce thermal management concerns. Further, the power management system may include a power source, such as a rechargeable battery to provide power and allow the timed ring suppression device 100 to be portable.

The peripheral controllers of the input/output processor 220 provide an interface with the attached peripherals including, for example, the voice/video player 231, voice/video recorder 232, the biometrics sensor 233, the display 235 (such as an LCD/LED/CRT display), the keypad 234, and the COMM port 130. The timed ring suppression program 110 may cooperate with the operating system and with the peripherals (e.g., display 235 and keypad 234) to provide a graphical user interface (GUI) for the timed ring suppression program 110. The GUI provides a convenient visual and/or audible interface with the user of the time ring suppression device 100. As is apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art, the user (e.g., the customer) interacts with the timed ring suppression program 110 over a variety of mediums, such as, for example, a stylus (shown as reference numeral 355 in FIG. 3), keyboard (shown as reference numeral 350 in FIG. 3), and punch buttons (shown as reference numerals 330, 335, 340, 342, 344, 346, 348, and 349 of FIG. 3) of the keyboard system, a display screen (shown as reference numeral 300 of FIG. 3) of the graphics subsystem, and/or a voice-activated menu prompt (shown as punch button 342 and speaker 360 in FIG. 3) of the

audio subsystem. Additionally, the peripheral bus controller provides an interface with the biometrics sensor **233**, such as, for example, a fingerprint ID device. The biometrics sensor **233** may provide security features that prevent unauthorized users from exploiting the timed ring suppression device **100**. The biometrics sensor **233** could also comprise retina recognition device and software, DNA/RNA recognition device and software, facial recognition device and software, speech recognition device and software, and/or scent recognition device and software.

The timed ring suppressor device **100** enables the circuit **145** to suppress the ringer **150** of telephone **160**. If, for example, the timed ring suppressor device **100** communicates with the telecommunications switch (shown as reference numeral **610** in FIGS. **6, 8-10**), the COMM port **236** receives the incoming line identification (ICLID) signal transmitted via phone line **130** with an incoming call. The ICLID signal includes telephone network information provided by a telecommunications provider. When the ICLID signal is received, the digital signal processor **202** interfaces with the timed ring suppression program **110** and with the internal memory device **204** and/or the external memory device **206** to associate a timed ring suppression profile that matches reference data of the ICLID signal (e.g., a matching telephone number). The timed ring suppression program **110** includes the timing parameter for suppressing subsequent rings of the ringer **150** after the ringer **150** produces an initial audible alert (e.g., a ring) of the incoming call. Thus, the customer (or another receiving party) is always provided an initial audible alert of the incoming call. Once the timed ring suppression profile is associated, the digital signal processor **202** and the clock source **237** operate with the timed ring suppressor **140** to suppress subsequent rings of the ringer **150** according to the timing parameter. Alternatively, the timed ring suppressor may be manually activated by a punch button (such as reference numeral **348** in FIG. **3**) to suppress one or more subsequent rings of the ringer **150**.

The timed ring suppression program **110** may be physically embodied and/or otherwise stored on or in a computer-readable medium. This computer-readable medium may include CD-ROM, DVD, tape, cassette, floppy disk, memory card, and large-capacity disk (such as IOMEGA®, ZIP®, JAZZ®, and other large-capacity memory products (IOMEGA®, ZIP®, and JAZZ® are registered trademarks of Iomega Corporation, 1821 W. Iomega Way, Roy, Utah 84067, 801.332.1000, www.iomega.com)). This computer-readable medium, or media, could be distributed to end-customers, licensees, and assignees. These types of computer-readable media, and other types not mention here but considered within the scope of this invention, allow the timed ring suppression program **110** to be easily disseminated.

The processor (such as reference numerals **104** of FIG. **1** and **204** of FIG. **2**) is typically a microprocessor. Advanced Micro Devices, Inc., for example, manufactures a full line of microprocessors, such as the ATHLON™ (ATHLON™ is a trademark of Advanced Micro Devices, Inc., one AMD Place, P.O. Box 3453, Sunnyvale, Calif. 94088-3453, 408.732.2400, 800.538.8450, www.amd.com). Sun Microsystems also designs and manufactures microprocessors (Sun Microsystems, Inc., **901** San Antonio Road, Palo Alto Calif. 94303, www.sun.com). The Intel Corporation manufactures microprocessors (Intel Corporation, 2200 Mission College Blvd., Santa Clara, Calif. 95052-8119, 408.765.8080, www.intel.com). Other manufacturers also offer microprocessors. Such other manufacturers include Motorola, Inc. (1303 East Algonquin Road, P.O. Box A3309 Schaumburg, Ill. 60196, www.Motorola.com), International Business Machines

Corp. (New Orchard Road, Armonk, N.Y. 10504, (914) 499-1900, www.ibm.com), and Transmeta Corp. (3940 Freedom Circle, Santa Clara, Calif. 95054, www.transmeta.com). Bambi, I removed the “hyperlinks” from this paragraph. I also noticed differing font sizes throughout the document, so I globally changed the font to 12.

Referring now to FIG. **3**, a perspective front view of the timed ring suppression device **100** of FIG. **2** includes a display screen **300** having displays for a time **302**, a date **304**, a numeric identifier **306** of an incoming Caller ID (e.g., ICLID signal) with an incoming call, a numeric identifier **308** of a matched timed ring suppression (TRS) Caller ID (i.e., reference data matched from the ICLID signal with data stored in a timed ring suppression profile), and a graphical user interface **320** for accessing, inputting, modifying, and/or otherwise managing a timed ring suppression profile. The timed ring suppression device **100** also includes a lighted display panel **310** that flashes to produce a visual alert of an incoming, timed ring suppressed call in an uninterrupted on-hook state (e.g., an incoming call that has activated at least one ring of the ringer and subsequently had the ringer silenced by the timed ring suppression device **100** such that the call is in an uninterrupted on-hook state). Because the panel would alert the customer of the incoming, time ring suppressed call, the customer (and/or other person wanting to answer the call) would know that the call is still available to answer even though the ringing is suppressed. Thus, the customer would know that if they took the phone off-hook (e.g., to answer the call or to place an outgoing call) then the incoming call would be connected. The lighted display panel **310** may be part of graphics subsystem **230** or may be an isolated component. The lighted display panel **310**, for example, could be remotely located on a wall, ceiling, or table to provide the visual alert. The lighted display panel **310** could operate via wireless communication (e.g., infrared and/or the I.E.E.E. 802 standards) with the timed ring suppression device **100**. The lighted display panel **310** could also operate via a wired connection. The keyboard system **232** includes punch buttons **330, 335, 340, 342, 344, 346, 348, 349**, keyboard **350**, and stylus **355**. The stylus **355** is connected by a cord **358** or other appropriate connection assembly (not shown) to a housing **370** of the timed ring suppression device **100** and positioned in a storage holder **357** when not in use. The stylus **355** may be used to interact with the keyboard **350** and/or with the display **300** to access, select, modify, and/or otherwise manage one or more timed ring suppression profiles. Alternatively, the user could use his/her fingers or other pointed device to select each character from the keyboard **350**. With regards to the punch buttons, they provide a convenient interface for quickly and conveniently interacting with the timed ring suppression device **100**. For example, the user may punch or press (1) a left arrow key **330** to scroll through recent outgoing calls (e.g., calls dialed from the communications device **150**) or recent incoming call to select a new telephone number to add to a timed ring suppression profile, go back a step when interacting with the timed ring suppression program **110**, and/or for other interactions with the timed ring suppression program **110**, (2) a right arrow key **335** to scroll forwards through recent outgoing calls or recent incoming call and for other interactions with the timed ring suppression program **110**, (3) a “Input/Modify” button **340** to initiate composing or editing one or more timed ring suppression profiles, (4) a “Voice” button **342** to record a voice or other audio message (in different embodiments, the audio message may be converted from a speech-to-text message to compose and/or modify one or more timed ring suppression profiles and/or to convert a text timed ring suppression profile (or a

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telephone number of the ICLID signal) from text-to-speech (such as with visually impaired customers), (5) a “Save” **344** button to store one or more timed ring suppression profiles, (6) a “Delete” button **346** to erase one or more timed ring suppression profiles, (6) a “Silence Ringer” button **348** to manually activate timed ring suppression of the ringer (such as when the incoming call is not associated with the timed ring suppression profile to automatically enable timed ring suppression), and (7) an “Enter” button **349** to enter and/or confirm selection of information displayed on the display screen **300**. Further, the “Voice” button **342** interfaces with a speaker/recorder **360** of the audio system to audibly present and/or record data of the timed ring suppression profile and to interact with the timed ring suppression program **110** to administer and otherwise manage the timed ring suppression device **100**.

Typically, the customer creates, modifies, and/or otherwise manages one or more timed ring suppression profiles by punching or pressing the “Input/Modify” button **340** that brings up an interactive “Input Telephone Number for Timed Ring Suppression” GUI (similar to GUI **320**). The customer may then select to (1) input a new address (e.g., telephone number) or (2) access a timed ring suppression caller identification organizer that stores and sorts data by (i) a telephone number associated with the incoming line identification signal, (ii) an outgoing telephone number dialed from the communications device, and/or (iii) a name associated with a telephone number, an outgoing telephone number, and/or a caller control signal. After the communications address is input, the customer presses the “Enter” button **349** to enter the communications address. After the address(es) is/are entered, the customer may be prompted by another GUI (not shown) to associate the address with a name and/or with a communications device so that when a call is received from that number and matched with the timed ring suppression profile, the display **300** provides the telephone number, name, communications device, and/or information such as a date/time of the incoming call, a geographic location identifier of the call, a calling party control/password to override timed ring suppression, and other information associated with the incoming call. Still further, the customer may be prompted by another GUI (not shown) to select a timing parameter that defines the time period for silencing an incoming call from a particular communications address. The timing parameter may also specify a time period to re-activate the ringer. For example, the customer may select to suppress a call from his/her mother after the initial ring for 18 seconds, and thereafter, to reactivate the ringer. That way the customer knows that his mother’s incoming call is still available to answer, and she has not terminated the call (and, thus infer that the call might be important enough to answer). Another example may be to suppress a call from unknown or blocked numbers indefinitely, that is, after the first ring, all subsequent rings of the incoming call having the unknown or blocked number are suppressed until the call is terminated and/or otherwise handled (e.g., answered by voice messaging system).

FIG. 4 is a similar block diagram of the timed ring suppressor **100** of FIG. 2; however, the timed ring suppressor **100** of FIG. 4 includes the telephone **160** that houses the voice/video player **231**, the voice/video recorder **232**, the biometrics sensor **233**, the keypad **234**, the display, and the communications (“comm.”) port. That is, these components are integral to telephone **160**, and, thus are not integrated into the peripheral timed ring suppression device **100** shown in FIG. 3. For example, a keypad of a telephone (not shown) may be used instead of the keypad **350**, punch buttons (**330**, **335**, **340**, **342**, **344**, **346**, **348**, and **349**), and stylus **355** of FIG. 2.

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FIG. 5 illustrates a timed ring suppression communications system including a calling party’s communications device **510**, at least one communications network **520**, and a receiving party’s (e.g., the customer’s) communications device **530** having or coupled with the timed ring suppression device **100**. The calling party uses communications device **510** to place a call (or other communication) over communications network **520** to the receiving party’s communications device **530**. A ringer (or other noise making device) of the communications device **530** produces an initial audible alert (e.g., one ring) and an incoming line identification (ICLID) signal associated with the incoming call is detected, decoded, and compared with one or more timed ring suppression profiles by the timed ring suppression device **100**. If reference data of the ICLID signal matches a timed ring suppression profile, then the timed ring suppression profile specifies a timing parameter (or uses a default timing parameter) to silence subsequent rings of the ringer for the incoming call. As discussed above, the timed ring suppression profile includes data for communications addresses (incoming and outgoing calls), names and/or other identifiers of a caller, time, date, geographic and/or other network identification information associated with the ICLID signal, identification of the caller’s communications device (e.g., cellular phone, satellite phone, etc.), the timing parameter to suppress ringing, and/or caller control override features. FIG. 6 is similar to FIG. 5; however, the calling party’s communications device is a wireless communications device, such as a cellular phone **605**. The call from cellular phone **605** is transmitted to an antenna (not shown), then coupled to a mobile switch (also not shown), and then routed via switch **610** into the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) **620**. The PSTN **620** decodes and associates the ICLID signal with the call, and, then routes the call with the ICLID signal to the destination address (e.g., the customer’s telephone number) via switch **610** and the incoming call and ICLID signal are transmitted to the timed ring suppression device **100** and telephone **160**.

FIG. 7 illustrates another timed ring suppression communications system that includes the calling party’s communications device **510** and the receiving party’s device **530** communicating with the communications network **520**. Neither the calling party’s communications device **510** nor the receiving party’s communications device **530** integrate and/or are coupled with the timed ring suppression device. Rather, the receiving party (e.g., customer and/or user) makes use of an access number, web page, and/or other medium of the telecommunications network to access, create, modify, and/or otherwise manage one or more timed ring suppression profiles and timed ring suppression services. For example, if the customer calls an access number, the customer is prompted for authorization and/or identification (e.g., a pin number associated with a billing number, password, and/or other verification information), and thereafter, an interactive voice-activated menu may present options for the customer to select in order to access stored timed ring suppression profiles, compose and/or generate a new timed ring suppression profile including inputting one or more communications addresses, names, timing parameters, and/or other data. The telecommunications network **520** stores the timed ring suppression profile and/or other preferences for timed ring suppression of the customer.

Moreover, the timed ring suppression menu presented by telecommunications network **520** may be programmed over a variety of mediums, such as, for example, a voice-activated and/or Dual Tone Multi-Frequency (DTMF) menu prompt. The customer, for example, might select to access stored timed ring suppression profiles by entering a “1” on a touch-

tone keypad or by speaking into a receiving audio subsystem and stating the word "one." This entry would then prompt the customer through choices such as accessing recently sent and/or recently received calls, alphanumeric listings of names for the calling party, and so on. After making a selection, the telecommunications network **520** retrieves the stored timed ring suppression profile from a database (such as reference numeral **845** of FIG. **8**). In addition, the customer might enter a code (e.g., "*99") in order to automatically activate timed ring suppression for all incoming calls. Similarly the customer could unblock timed ring suppression by entering another code.

FIG. **8** shows a more detailed timed ring suppression communications system that makes use of the communications network to enable, disable, and/or otherwise manage timed ring suppression similar to the communications system shown in FIG. **7**. The timed ring suppression communications system of FIG. **8** includes the calling party's communications device **605** (shown as a cellular telephone), the communications switch **610** connected to the PSTN **620** that includes a service switching point (SSP) **820**, a service control point (SCP) **830**, an Intranet **835** (for the telecommunications provider to administer and program the telecommunications network components or for the customer to access and program timed ring suppression services), a timed ring suppression (TRS) Dataserver **840**, a database of one or more timed ring suppression profiles **845**, an Internet Service Provider (e.g., BellSouth Internet Services) **850**, a data network **860**, a gateway **865**, a destination communications switch **610**, and one or more receiving party's communications device(s) shown as telephone **160** capable of communications with the telecommunications network and as modem **810** and personal computer **800** having the timed ring suppression program **110** (referred to as the "Timed Ring Suppression Management Module" in FIG. **8**) and an Internet Protocol address **805** to enable communications with the data network **860**. Each switch **610** enables the connected communications devices **130**, **160**, **605**, **810**, and **800** to communicate electronic communication signals via the data network **860** (e.g., world wide electronic data network such as an Internet, an Intranet, and/or an Extranet) and/or the telecommunications network **620** (e.g., a central office (CO), a mobile telephone switching office (MTSO), and/or a combination CO/MTSO). The telecommunications network **620** may use any means of coupling one of the switches **610** to the telecommunications network **620**, but the coupling means is preferably high-capacity, high-bandwidth optical transport services, Gigabit Ethernet services, and/or the like. As those of ordinary skill in the art of telecommunications understand, the telecommunications network **620** could also link each of the switches **610** via other appropriate means, such as, for example a Synchronous Optical Network (SONET) structure with redundant, multiple rings.

The customer may use the TRS Management Module (also referred to as the timed ring suppression program) **110** running on personal computer **800** with Intranet **835** to access and login to the TRS DataServer **840** to establish a timed ring suppression profile in the database **845**. Alternatively, an administrator of the telecommunications network **620** could similarly use another personal computer (not shown) and/or alternate workstation (not shown) networked with the Intranet **835** to access, add, delete, store, modify, and manage the database **845** of one or more timed ring suppression profiles. The timed ring suppression profiles control access, sharing, notification, routing, security, transactions, troubleshooting, management, and/or additional processing of timed ring suppression profiles exchanged to/from one or more communi-

cations networks customers, users, and non-customers. More specifically, the timed ring suppression profiles establish preferences for enabling timed ring suppression including (1) archiving the timed ring suppression profile to a storage device associated with the telecommunications service provider (so that a database of timed ring suppression profiles including one or more timed ring suppression profiles and/or associated communications addresses are stored), (2) encrypting the timed ring suppression profile (or a portion of the timed ring suppression profile) so that only the receiving party's communications device can enable timed ring suppression, (3) copying the timed ring suppression profile (e.g., copying the timed ring suppression profile from/to the timed ring suppression device **100** of FIG. **2** to the telecommunications network **620**), and (4) associating the timed ring suppression profile with a variety of fields, files, and/or other data for Timed Ring Suppression Services, such as, for example login information associated with the customer, user, and/or administrator, password, telephone number(s) or Service Node(s) of the customer (this may include a plurality of addresses that are associated with a Service Node or other switch serving the receiving party's communications device), TCP/IP address of the customer, email address of the customer, profile of the calling party's communications device associated with the matched timed ring suppression profile (e.g., presentation formats of various communications devices), a time or date identifier (e.g., day of week or calendar date), other information associated with the incoming line identification (ICLID) communications signal, display and/or presentation data associated with a GUI (e.g., color, font, placement on screen, etc.), telecommunications network defaults, and timed ring suppression defaults. Typically, the Timed Ring Suppression Profile includes data for (1) the identifier of the calling party (e.g., a name of the calling party), (2) the identifier of the incoming communications address (e.g., a phone number of the calling party's telephone), (3) the time of the incoming call, (4) the date of the incoming call, (5) the geographic region associated with the incoming call, (6) caller control features to disable timed ring suppression, (7) the identifier of the calling party's communications device, (8) other ICLID information, (9) the timing parameter to suppress ringing, (10) other parameters that enable selective timed ring suppression including times of day and days of week, (11) formatting and configuration parameters to enable timed ring suppression for various communications devices, and (12) second call during timed ring suppression parameters to control notification alerts of secondary incoming communications during timed ring suppression. The data of the Timed Ring Suppression Services provide instructions for (1) billing, (2) identification and authentication parameters, (3) parameters to enable and to bypass the disable parameters, (4) memory services for stored timed ring suppression profile data, and/or (5) configuration and formatting preferences for each calling party's communications device communicating with each communications network. In addition, the data for the Timed Ring Suppression Services may include instructions for troubleshooting problems including error messages. Thus, TRS DataServer **840** functions as a computer server, database, and processor that is dedicated to managing timed ring suppression over other connected networks (e.g., data network **860**) to the receiving party's communications device.

The telecommunications network **620** may include wired, optical, and/or wireless elements and may further include private network elements, such as private branch exchanges (PBXs), and/or other elements (not shown). The telecommunications network **620** includes Advanced Intelligent Net-

work (AIN) componentry controlling many features of the network. The telecommunications network **620** and/or each of the switches **610** could also include a packet-based “soft switch” that uses software control to provide voice, video, and/or data services by dynamically changing its connection data rates and protocols types. If the telecommunications network **620** and/or one of the switches **610** should include a softswitch, the AIN componentry is replaced by an application server that interfaces with the softswitch via a packet protocol, such as Session Initiation Protocol (SIP). The means of communicating the timed ring suppression profile between or among the receiving party’s communications device **160**, the timed ring suppression device **100**, the switches **610** the telecommunications network **620** including AIN componentry, the data network **860** including the gateway **865**, and the calling party’s communications device **605** include a variety of means, including optical transmission of data (e.g., any medium capable of optically transmitting the data), wireless transmission of data (e.g., wireless communications of the data using any portion of the electromagnetic spectrum), and/or fixed-wire transmission of data (e.g., any medium capable of transmitting electrons along a conductor). Fiber optic technologies, spectrum multiplexing (such as Dense Wave Division Multiplexing), Ethernet and Gigabit Ethernet services, Infrared, the family of IEEE **802** standards, and Digital Subscriber Lines (DSL) are just some examples of the transmission means. The signaling between the receiving party’s communications device **160**, the timed ring suppression device **100**, the switches **610**, the telecommunications network **620** including AIN componentry, the data network **860** including the gateway **865**, and the calling party’s communications device **605**, however, are well understood in by those of ordinary skill the art and will not be further described. Further, those of ordinary skill in the art will be able to apply the principles of this invention to their own network configurations which may differ substantially from the communications system(s) shown in the figures.

Once a call is placed from the calling party’s communications device **605** to the receiving party’s communications address (e.g., telephone number), the call is routed via switch **610** to telecommunications network **620** as described above. The incoming call and other communications signals (e.g., ICLID signal) associated with an address of calling party’s communications device **605** arrive at SSP **820**. The SSP suspends processing of the call and queries the SCP **830** to determine whether ring suppression is required. The SCP **830** queries the TRS DataServer **840** for further timed ring suppression profile processing and routing information. The TRS DataServer **840** accesses the database **845** of timed ring suppression profiles to determine if the receiving party’s communications device subscribes to timed ring suppression and/or to obtain other preferences, instructions, files, and/or associated timed ring suppression data. Thereafter, the telecommunications network **620** may enable timed ring suppression via switch **610** to the receiving party’s communications device **160**. For example, the telecommunications network **620** may route the ICLID signal and activate an initial audible alert to the communications device **160** (according to the matched timed ring suppression profile or default timed ring suppression parameters). Thereafter, the telecommunications network silences subsequent rings (or another subsequent audible alert) according to the matched timed ring suppression profile (or defaults). Alternatively, the telecommunications network **620** may enable timed ring suppression via ISP **750** (or other connection) to the data network **860**. The data network **860** then enables timed ring suppression via the gateway **865** to the receiving party’s IP commu-

nications device (e.g., PC **800** and modem **810**) via switch **610**. Still, another alternative, is for the telecommunications network **620** to transmit controls that enable timed ring suppression directly to the gateway **865** (such as when the timed ring suppression profile associates a static IP address of the receiving party’s IP communications device) to enable timed ring suppression of the receiving party’s communications device via switch **610**. In addition to enabling timed ring suppression profile, the telecommunications network **620** may also connect the calling party’s communications device with the receiving party’s communications device to establish an available connection. That is, when the receiving party is alerted (via the initial audible alert, the visual alert, and/or a subsequent alert after timed ring suppression) of the incoming communication, the receiving party can answer the incoming communication from the calling party. For example, the receiving party may review the Caller ID after the initial audible alert and see the lit display panel to know that the call is still on-hook (even though there isn’t a continuous audible alert to indicate availability), and then decide to answer the call to have a conversation with the calling party.

FIG. **9** is a schematic of a timed ring suppression communications system similar to the communications system disclosed in FIG. **8**; however, the timed ring suppression communications system of FIG. **9** illustrates alternate receiving party’s communications devices **910** that include a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) **911**, an IP phone **912**, a modem **913**, an interactive pager **914**, a global positioning system (GPS) **915**, an MP3/4 player **916**, a digital signal processor (DSP) **917**, an interactive television **918**, and a satellite phone **919**. Regardless of the receiving party’s communications device (reference numerals **160**, **530**, **800**, **810** and **911-919**), the telecommunications network **620** enables timed ring suppression and enables communications with the receiving party’s communications device (including audio, text (e.g., ASCII), video, other digital formats, and combination thereof). Accordingly, the telecommunications network may include and/or be coupled with a multi-protocol communications interface that acts as a gateway to enable timed ring suppression. For example, if the receiving party’s communications device uses the Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) technique, then timed ring suppression is enable and communications use the Wireless Mark-up Language (WML) as known in the art. The Wireless Mark-up Language (WML) and the WAP technique are known and will not be further described. This is a description of a solution for a specific wireless protocol, such as WAP. This solution may be clearly extended to other wireless protocol, such as i-mode, VoiceXML (Voice eXtensible Markup Language), Dual Tone Multi-Frequency (DTMF), and other signaling means.

This invention further provides for caller control systems and methods to override timed ring suppression. For example, the calling party may place an incoming call to a telephone number of the receiving party’s communications device that has activated timed ring suppression (activated either by way of the customer’s hardware and equipment—the timed ring suppression device **100**—or by way of the communications network—the TRS services of PSTN **620**). The calling party enters an interrupt code that authorizes interruption or disabling of timed ring suppression and connects the incoming call while maintaining a continuous alert/indicator of the incoming call, and, thus overrides suppression of the ringer **150** (or other indicator) according to the timing parameter. The interrupt code entered by the calling party is received in a communications network, such as, for example the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) **620**. Alternatively, the

interrupt code may be received by another communications network, such as a mobile switching network, a satellite network, a data communications network (e.g., internet, intranet, and/or extranet), and other networks providing communications. The communications network detects, decodes, and processes the incoming communications signal and the interrupt code with a timed ring suppression profile associated with the receiving party's communications device. If the communications network verifies authorization to interrupt or disable timed ring suppression, then the incoming communications signal and/or an interrupt timed ring suppression signal are transmitted to the receiving party's communications device so that the incoming call is connected and the receiving party's communications device provides a continuous alert (e.g., ringing) despite the receiving party's communications device having activated timed ring suppression services (e.g., to silence subsequent alerts of an incoming communication according to a timed parameter). Further, the communications network may send a notification message to the receiving party's communications device to notify a user that timed ring suppression is interrupted and/or disabled. For example, the notification message may be sent instead of a caller identification message so that a caller identification device or the timed ring suppressor **100** (via screen **300**) displays "TRS OVERRIDE" to alert the receiving party that the caller has disabled timed ring suppression.

According to an embodiment, a caller controlled timed ring suppression system includes a communications dataserver (such as TRS DataServer shown as reference numeral **840** in FIGS. **8-9**) communicating with a communications network (such as Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) shown as reference numeral **620** in FIGS. **6, 8-9**) for detecting, decoding, and communicating an incoming communications signal on a communications link from a calling party's communications device to a receiving party's communications device and includes a timed ring suppression application communicating with at least one of the communications network, the communications dataserver, and the receiving party's communications device. The communications dataserver stores a timed ring suppression profile that includes a telephone number, a directory name, a date/time identifier, a geographical identifier, a caller control interrupt code, and a timing parameter for suppressing a communications indicator of the receiving party's communications device after the receiving party's communications device activates the communications indicator to produce an initial alert of the incoming communications signal. The timed ring suppression application generates a timed ring suppression signal that is communicated to the receiving party's communications device (and/or to a switch) to suppress subsequent alerts by the communications indicator of the incoming communications signal according to the timed ring suppression profile. Further, the timed ring suppression application further generates an interrupt timed ring suppression signal in response to receiving the caller control interrupt code from a calling party. The interrupt timed ring suppression signal is communicated to the receiving party's communications device to temporarily disable the timed ring suppression signal such that the communications indicator maintains a continuous, uninterrupted alert of the uninterrupted, on-hook incoming communications signal. According to another embodiment, a caller controlled timed ring suppression system includes a calling party's communications device that transmits an incoming communications signal to a communications network, and the communications network communicates the incoming communications signal and/or an interrupt timed ring suppression signal to a receiving party's communica-

tions device. The communications network may process an incoming line identification (ICLID) signal of the incoming communications signal to generate an interrupt timed ring suppression signal and transmit the incoming communications signal and/or the interrupt timed ring suppression signal to the receiving party's communications device. Further, the interrupt timed ring suppression signal is communicated to the receiving party's communications device having a timed ring suppressor (externally coupled and/or integrated) and operates to override a timed ring suppressor of a timed ring suppression device such that when the incoming communications signal is communicated to the receiving party's communications device, the receiving party's communications device presents a continuous indicator of the incoming communications signal while the communications signal is in an uninterrupted, on-hook state.

FIG. **10** is a block diagram showing another embodiment of the timed ring suppression device similar to the timed ring suppression device of FIG. **1**; however the timed ring suppression device of FIG. **10** includes a system controller **1002**, processor **1004**, memory system **1006** including database **1008** and timed ring suppression management module **1010** (also referred to as the timed ring suppression program), graphics system **1020**, keyboard system **1022**, audio system **1024**, an interface with a ringer of a communications device **1030**, a timed ring suppressor **1040**, a clock **1045**, a wireless communications device transceiver **1050**, a wired communications device port/connection **1055**, and a power source **1060**. The system controller **1002** provides a bridging function between the processor, the graphics subsystem **1020**, the keyboard subsystem **1022**, the audio subsystem **1024**, the memory subsystem **1006**, the timed ring suppressor **1014**, and the interface **1030**. The interface **1030** may include a peripheral bus controller that is an integrated circuit serving as an input/output hub for various peripheral ports. These peripheral ports enable the timed ring suppressor to control and to communicate with a variety of communications devices through Wireless Comm Device Transceiver **1030** (such as Wireless 802.11 and Infrared) and Wired Comm Device Port **1055** (such as modem V90+ and compact flash slots). In addition, the stored one or more timed ring suppression profiles may be stored by local memory system **1006** or by a peripheral storage device (such as TRS DataServer **840** shown in FIG. **8**). According to an embodiment, the Comm Port **1055** may communicate with a communications network (such as reference numeral **520** of FIG. **5**) and transmit the timed ring suppression profile. In an alternate embodiment, the Comm Port **1055** may format the timed ring suppression profile for a connected or integrated communications device (via the Wireless Comm Device Transceiver **1050** and/or Wired Comm Device Port/Connection **1055**), and, the connected or integrated communications device would then initiate communications with the communications network and transmit the timed ring suppression profile (via the connected or integrated communications device). Still, in another alternate embodiment, the interface **1030** may include intelligent componentry that detects or otherwise identifies the receiving party's communications device and formats or otherwise configures the timed ring suppression profile or enables timed ring suppression for the receiving party's communications device.

FIG. **11** is another block diagram of a manually-activated timed ring suppression device that includes the timed ring suppressor **140** and circuit **145** coupled with ringer **150** of telephone **160**. The timed ring suppressor **140** is enabled to open circuit **145** to prevent current/voltage from flowing to the ringer **150**, and, thus, silence subsequent ringing of an

uninterrupted on-hook call after the call has initially activated the ringer. For example, the timed ring suppressor **140** could be a punch button that the customer presses after an incoming call produces an audible alert (e.g., a ring). Thereafter, subsequent ringing is suppressed for a selected timing parameter. For example, if the timing parameter is set at 12 seconds (approximately two ring cycles), then the customer could press the timed ring suppressor **140** to silence the ringer for 12 seconds, and, if the ringing resumed, then press the timed ring suppressor **140** again to silence the ringer for another 12 seconds.

Referring now to FIGS. **12-16**, this invention addresses secondary incoming communications while the (first) incoming communication is timed ring suppressed as discussed in the above embodiments. FIG. **12** illustrates a timed ring suppression communications system similar to FIGS. **5** and **7**; however, the timed ring suppression communications system of FIG. **12** further includes a second calling party's communications device **1210**. The second calling party uses communications device **1210** to place a call (or other communication) over the communications network **520** to the receiving party's communications device **530** while a ringer (or other call alert) is timed ring suppressed for a first call from the first calling party. The ringer of the receiving party's communications device **530** produces an alert (either an alert similar to the notification of the first incoming call or a distinctive alert, such as a distinctive ring pattern (or alternate noise maker)) while the notification alert/indicator of the first incoming call is suppressed. Similar to above, an incoming line identification (ICLID) signal associated with the second incoming call is detected, decoded, and compared with one or more timed ring suppression profiles by the timed ring suppression device **100**. The ICLID signal of the second incoming call may be matched with a second timed ring suppression profile, the timed ring suppression profile of the first incoming call, and/or with timed ring suppression defaults (such as whether to provide notification of the second incoming call during timed ring suppression of the first incoming call) to generate a supplanted timed ring suppression signal that activates an indicator/alert of the secondary incoming call. Thus, this invention provides for notification of the secondary call when the notification of the first call is suppressed. And so, this invention provides a pseudo-reverse call-waiting service referred to as "Second Call During Ring Suppression."

FIG. **13** is similar to FIG. **6**; however, the timed ring suppression communications system illustrates the second calling party's communications device as a POTS phone **1310** coupled with switch **610** to the PSTN **620**. FIG. **14** illustrates a more detailed timed ring suppression communications system that makes use of one or more communications network to enable, disable, and/or otherwise manage notification of secondary incoming communications during timed ring suppression (similar to the communications system of FIG. **13**). The communications system of FIG. **14** includes the second calling party's communications device **1310** (shown as POTS phone), the (first) calling party's communications device **605** (shown as a cellular telephone), the communications switches **610** connected to the PSTN **620** that includes the service switching point (SSP) **820**, the service control point (SCP) **830**, the Intranet **835**, the timed ring suppression (TRS) Dataserver **840**, the database of one or more timed ring suppression profiles **845**, the Internet Service Provider (e.g., America On-Line) **850**, the data network **860**, the gateway **865**, the destination communications switch **610**, and one or more receiving party's communications device(s) **1400** shown as telephone **160**, the personal computer **800**, the Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) **911**, the IP phone **912**, the

modem **913**, the interactive pager **914**, the global positioning system (GPS) **915**, the MP3/4 player **916**, the digital signal processor (DSP) **917**, the interactive television **918**, and the satellite phone **919**. Regardless of the receiving party's communications device (reference numerals **160**, **530**, **800**, **810** and **911-919**), the telecommunications network **620** and/or the data network **860** enable Second Call During Ring Suppression to provide notification and routing of secondary communications to the receiving party's communications device (including audio, text (e.g., ASCII), video, other digital formats, and combination thereof).

Typically, a secondary call is placed from the second calling party's communications device **1310** to the receiving party's communications address (e.g., telephone number) and the secondary call is routed via switch **610** to telecommunications network **620** as described above. The secondary incoming call and other communications signals (e.g., ICLID signal) associated with an address of second calling party's communications device **1310** arrive at SSP **820**. The SSP suspends processing of the secondary call and queries the SCP **830** to determine whether ring suppression is engaged for a first incoming call from the (first) calling party's communications device **605** as described above. This may involve switch **610** (or alternate communications network components) to identify both an uninterrupted, on-hook state of the receiving party's communications device and to identify a timed ring suppressed communication from the calling party's communications device **605**. If ring suppression is engaged, the SCP **830** then queries the TRS DataServer **840** for Second Call During Ring Suppression processing and routing information. The TRS DataServer **840** accesses the database **845** of timed ring suppression profiles to obtain preferences, instructions, files, and/or associated Second Call During Ring Suppression data. Thereafter, the telecommunications network **620** may enable Second Call During Ring Suppression via switch **610** to the receiving party's communications device **160**. For example, the telecommunications network **620** may route the ICLID signal of the secondary call and activate an audible alert (either similar to the alert for the first incoming call or a distinctive alert depending on Second Call During Timed Ring Suppression preferences) to the communications device **160** during timed ring suppression of the first incoming call. That is, the receiving party's communications device activates an audible alert, such as the ringer, to notify the receiving party of the secondary incoming call so that the receiving party can answer the secondary call while the first call is timed ring suppressed. Second Call During Ring Suppression may be particularly useful in situations when the customer receives a first call (and may be able to identify the caller from the ICLID and/or timed ring suppression signal) and wants to wait to answer the first call (kind of like putting the first call on temporary hold with timed alerts that remind the customer that the first call is timed ring suppressed). Then, the customer receives notification of a second call (either a similar alert or a distinctive alert) and answers the second call while the first call is suppressed. Thereafter, the customer can maintain the communications link with the second call and answer the suppressed first call (similar to answering secondary incoming calls of a call waiting service). Or, alternatively, the customer may activate (either via timed ring suppressor **100** or by a timed ring suppression profile of the telecommunications network **620**) timed ring suppression of the second call. Still further, the customer may activate that no secondary calls are routed, notified, and/or communicated during timed ring suppression of a first call (i.e., if an incoming communication is suppressed, then all secondary communications are not connected to the commu-

nications address of the receiving party's communications device, and these secondary communications may be further processed according to other call handling options).

FIGS. 15 and 16 are flowcharts showing processes of providing Second Call During Ring Suppression according to embodiments of this invention. While the processes in FIGS. 15 and 16 are shown in series, these processes may occur in different orders and/or at simultaneous times as one of ordinary skill in the art will understand.

A customer (and/or telecommunications service provider personnel) uses a timed ring suppression device 100 (such as reference numeral 100 of FIG. 3) to access, create, modify, and/or otherwise manage a timed ring suppression profile to enable timed ring suppression including preferences for second call during timed ring suppression [block 1510]. Alternatively, the customer (and/or personnel) could use his/her communications device and a communications network (such as reference numerals 620 and 860 of FIG. 8) to access, create, modify, and/or otherwise manage a timed ring suppression profile. Once a secondary incoming call is detected, the ICLID signal (and/or other reference data of the secondary incoming call, such as data that identifies the secondary/other calling party) is decoded [block 1520] and compared with one or more timed ring suppression profiles including the timed ring suppression profile of the (first) incoming communication [block 1530]. If the timed ring suppression profile of the first incoming communication and/or the timed ring suppression profile of the secondary incoming communication specify notification preferences (e.g., times of day to activate alert/indicator, times of day to completely suppress alert/indicator of secondary incoming communication during TRS, selected notification alerts/indicators for secondary incoming communication such as presenting Caller ID data of the secondary incoming communication while suppressing a ringer and selectively activating and deactivating other alerts/indicators of the secondary incoming communication) [block 1540], then the next step is to determine whether the TRS profile associated with the secondary incoming communication also includes a timing parameter to suppress the notification alert/indicator (e.g., audio, visual, and/or sensory indicators to notify the receiving party that there is an incoming communication) [block 1620]. If there is a timing parameter, then an initial notification alert/indicator is activated [block 1630] and subsequent notification alerts/indicators are suppressed according to the TRS profile associated with the secondary incoming communication [block 1640]. If there is not a timing parameter, then the notification alert/indicator identified by one or more TRS profiles is activated and a communications connection is established to the receiving party's communications device [block 1660].

If, however, the timed ring suppression profile of the first incoming communication and/or the secondary incoming communication does not specify notification preferences [block 1540], then the next step is to determine if there are defaults for notification of secondary incoming communications during timed ring suppression [block 1610]. If there are not any defaults, then the ringer (of the Comm device) is activated to provide notification of the secondary incoming communication and a communications connection is established so that the receiving party can answer [block 1650]. The ring pattern for the secondary incoming communication may be similar to the ring pattern of the first incoming communication or, alternatively, the ring pattern may be different like a distinctive ring to distinguish that there is a secondary incoming communication during ring suppression. If there are defaults, then the next step is to determine whether the TRS defaults associated with the secondary incoming com-

munication include a timing parameter to suppress the notification alert/indicator [block 1620]. If there is a timing parameter, then an initial notification alert/indicator is activated [block 1630] and subsequent notification alerts/indicators are suppressed according to the TRS profile associated with the secondary incoming communication [block 1640]. If there is not a default timing parameter, then the notification alert indicator identified by the defaults is activated and a communications connection is established to the receiving party's communications device [block 1660].

While several exemplary implementations of embodiments of this invention are described herein, various modifications and alternate embodiments will occur to those of ordinary skill in the art. For example, the next generation "softswitch" simply replaces the SCP with an "application server." This application server is a conventional computer server that also includes triggers for telecommunications services so that "new entrants" into telecommunications services (e.g., new telecommunications service providers) don't have to purchase an expensive SSP and/or SCP to process telephone calls. This next-generation packet network represents an alternative operating environment for the network enabled timed ring suppression systems, methods, programs, and apparatuses. Here the telecommunications switch includes a packet-based "softswitch." This "softswitch" uses software control to provide voice, data, and video services by dynamically changing its connection data rates and protocols types. An application server interfaces with the "softswitch" via a packet protocol, such as Session Initiation Protocol (SIP). This application server includes voice service protocols, triggers, and operations that allow the PSTN and the data network (e.g., the world wide electronic communications network) to interoperate. Still, another example is using the timed ring suppression systems and methods to selectively activate and deactivate subsequent incoming call indicators (e.g., a vibrator, a lighted panel, a heat sensor, and/or other indicators to alert the customer of an incoming call) according to the timing parameter. Accordingly, this invention is intended to include those other variations, modifications, and alternate embodiments that adhere to the spirit and scope of this invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for use by a server for instructing a recipient device to produce audible alerts, comprising:
 - determining, by the server, a first call from a calling address to a called address associated with the recipient device;
 - determining, by the server, suppression of the audible alerts at the recipient device based on the calling address;
 - instructing, by the server, the recipient device to produce a first one of the audible alerts in response to the first call;
 - determining, by the server, a subsequent call from the calling address to the called address of the recipient device; and
 - determining, by the server, not to instruct the recipient device to produce any of the audible alerts in response to the subsequent call based on the suppression.
2. The method of claim 1, further comprising processing a visual alert of the first call.
3. The method of claim 1, further comprising processing visual alerts of the first call.
4. The method of claim 1, further comprising processing a visual alert of the subsequent call.
5. The method of claim 1, further comprising processing visual alerts of the subsequent call.
6. A system, comprising:
 - a processor; and

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a memory storing instructions that when executed cause the processor to perform operations, the operations comprising:

determining a first call from a calling address to a called address associated with a recipient device;

determining suppression of audible alerts based on the calling address;

instructing the recipient device to produce an initial audible alert of the first call;

determining a subsequent call from the calling address to the called address; and

determining not to produce any audible alerts of the subsequent call in response to the suppression.

7. The system of claim 6, wherein the operations further comprise processing a visual alert of the first call.

8. The system of claim 6, wherein the operations further comprise processing visual alerts of the first call.

9. The system of claim 6, wherein the operations further comprise processing a visual alert of the second call.

10. The system of claim 6, wherein the operations further comprise processing visual alerts of the second call.

11. The system of claim 6, wherein the operations further comprise processing a signal to generate the initial audible alert of the first call.

12. The system of claim 6, wherein the operations further comprise generating the initial audible alert of the first call.

13. The system of claim 6, wherein the operations further comprise sending a notification of the first call to the called address.

14. The system of claim 6, wherein the operations further comprise sending a notification of the subsequent call to the called address.

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15. The system of claim 6, wherein the operations further comprise querying a database for the calling address associated with the subsequent call.

16. A memory storing instructions that when executed cause a processor to perform operations, the operations comprising:

determining a first call from a calling address to a called address associated with a recipient device;

comparing the calling address to a profile storing suppressed addresses;

determining a match between the calling address and one of the suppressed addresses;

determining suppression of audible alerts based on the calling address;

processing, in response to the match, an instruction for an initial one of the audible alerts of the first call to be produced at the recipient device;

determining a subsequent call from the calling address to the called address;

determining not to produce any of the audible alerts of the subsequent call in response to the suppression; and

processing the initial one of the audible alerts for a different call from a different calling address to the called address during the suppression.

17. The memory of claim 16, wherein the operations further comprise processing a visual alert of the first call.

18. The memory of claim 16, wherein the operations further comprise processing visual alerts of the first call.

19. The memory of claim 16, wherein the operations further comprise processing a visual alert of the subsequent call.

20. The memory of claim 16, wherein the operations further comprise processing visual alerts of the subsequent call.

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